EREMA.

R.D. BLACKMORE.

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EREMA

VOL. I.

EREMA

OR

MY FATHER'S SIN

BY

R. D. BLACKMORE

AUTHOR OF 'THE MAID OF SKER' ETC.

Κἀπὸ ματρὸς ἄφαρ βέβακεν
ὥστε πόρτις ἐρήμα—SOPH. *Trach.* 529

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

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EREMA,

OR

MY FATHER'S SIN

CHAPTER I.

DESERT.

The sins of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me.

THESE are the words that have haunted me always. This is the ban which has darkened my life.

If I had not known my father, if I had not loved him, if I had not closed his eyes in desert silence deeper than the silence of the grave; even if I could have buried and bewailed him duly; the common business of this world, and

the universal carelessness, might have led me down the general track that leads to nothing.

Until my father fell and died, I never dreamed that he could die. I knew that his mind was quite made up to see me safe in my new home, and then himself to start again for still remoter solitudes. And when his mind was thus made up, who had ever known him fail of it?

If ever a resolute man there was, that very man was my father. And he showed it now, in this the last and fatal act of his fatal life. 'Captain, here I leave you all,' he shouted to the leader of our waggon-train, at a place where a dark, narrow gorge departed from the moil-some mountain-track. 'My reasons are my own; let no man trouble himself about them. All my baggage I leave with you. I have paid my share of the venture, and shall claim it at Sacramento. My little girl and I will take this short cut through the mountains.'

'General!' answered the leader of our train, standing up on his board in amazement. 'Forgive and forget, sir; forgive and forget. What

is a hot word spoken hotly? If not for your own sake, at least come back for the sake of your young daughter.'

'A fair haven to you!' replied my father; he offered me his hand, and we were out of sight of all that wearisome, drearisome, uncompanionable company with whom, for eight long weeks at least, we had been dragging our rough way. I had known in a moment that it must be so, for my father never argued. Argument, to his mind, was a very nice amusement for the weak. My spirits rose as he swung his bearskin bag upon his shoulder, and the last sound of the labouring caravan groaned in the distance, and the fresh air and the freedom of the mountains moved around us. It was the 29th of May—Oak-apple Day in England—and to my silly youth this vast extent of snowy mountains was a nice place for a cool excursion.

Moreover, from day to day I had been in most wretched anxiety, so long as we remained with people who could not allow for us. My father, by his calm reserve, and dignity, and largeness, had always among European people

kept himself secluded; but now in this rough life, so pent in trackless tracts, and pressed together by perpetual peril, everybody's manners had been growing free and easy. Every man had been compelled to tell, as truly as he could, the story of his life thus far, to amuse his fellow-creatures—every man, I mean, of course, except my own poor father. Some told their stories every evening, until we were quite tired—although they were never the same twice over—but my father could never be coaxed to say a syllable more than, 'I was born, and I shall die.'

This made him very unpopular with the men, though all the women admired it; and if any rough fellow could have seen a sign of fear, the speaker would have been insulted. But his manner and the power of his look were such that even after ardent spirits no man saw fit to be rude to him. Nevertheless, there had always been the risk of some sad outrage.

'Erema,' my father said to me, when the dust from the rear of the caravan was lost behind a cloud of rocks, and we two stood in the wilder-

ness alone ; 'do you know, my own Erema, why I bring you from them ?'

'Father dear, how should I know? You have done it, and it must be right.'

'It is not for their paltry insults. Child, you know what I think all that. It is for you, my only child, that I am doing what now I do.'

I looked up into his large, sad eyes without a word, in such a way that he lifted me up in his arms and kissed me, as if I were a little child instead of a maiden just fifteen. This he had never done before, and it made me a little frightened. He saw it, and spoke on the spur of the thought, though still with one arm round me.

'Perhaps you will live to be thankful, my dear, that you had a stern, cold father. So will you meet the world all the better; and, little one, you have a rough world to meet.'

For a moment I was quite at a loss to account for my father's manner; but now, in looking back, it is so easy to see into things. At the time I must have been surprised, and full of puzzled eagerness.

Not half so well can I recall the weakness, anguish, and exhaustion of body and spirit afterwards. It may have been three days of wandering, or it may have been a week, or even more than that, for all that I can say for certain. Whether the time were long or short, it seemed as if it would never end. My father believed that he knew the way to the house of an old settler at the western foot of the mountains, who had treated him kindly some years before, and with whom he meant to leave me, until he had made arrangements elsewhere. If we had only gone straightway thither, nightfall would have found us safe beneath that hospitable roof.

My father was vexed, as I well remember, at coming, as he thought, in sight of some great landmark, and finding not a trace of it. Although his will was so very strong, his temper was good about little things, and he never began to abuse all the world because he had made a mistake himself.

'Erema,' he said, 'at this corner where we stand, there ought to be a very large pine-tree

in sight, or rather a gigantic tree, without a name, at least twice as high as any tree that grows in Europe, or Africa even. From the plains it can be seen for a hundred miles or more. It stands higher up the mountain-side than any other tree of even half its size, and that makes it so conspicuous. My eyes must be failing me, from all this glare; but it must be in sight. Can you see it now?'

'I see no tree of any kind whatever, but scrubby bushes and yellow tufts; and oh, father, I am so thirsty.'

'Naturally. But now look again. It stands on a ridge, the last ridge that bars the view of all the lowland. It is a very straight tree, and regular like a mighty column, except that on the northern side the wind from the mountains has torn a gap in it. Are you sure that you cannot see it — a long way off, but conspicuous?'

'Father, I am sure that I cannot see any tree half as large as a broomstick. Far or near, I see no tree.'

'Then my eyes are better than my memory.

We must cast back for a mile or two; but it cannot make much difference.'

'Through the dust and the sand?' I began to say; but a glance from him stopped my murmuring. And the next thing I can call to mind must have happened a long time afterwards.

Beyond all doubt, in this desolation, my father gave his life for mine. I did not know it at the time, nor had the faintest dream of it; being so young and weary-worn, and obeying him by instinct. It is a fearful thing to think of—now that I can think of it—but to save my own little worthless life I must have drained every drop of water from his flat half-gallon jar. The water was hot and the cork-hole sandy, and I grumbled even while drinking it; and what must my father (who was dying all the while for a drop, but never took one), what must he have thought of me?

But he never said a word, so far as I remember; and that makes it all the worse for me. We had strayed away into a dry, volcanic district of the mountains, where all the snow-

rivers run out quite early ; and of natural springs there was none forthcoming. All we had to guide us was a little traveller's compass (whose needle stuck fast on the pivot with sand) and the glaring sun, when he came to sight behind the hot, dry, driving clouds. The clouds were very low, and flying almost in our faces, like vultures sweeping down on us. To me they seemed to shriek over our heads at the others rushing after them. But my father said that they could make no sound, and I never contradicted him.

CHAPTER II.

A PACIFIC SUNSET.

At last we came to a place from which the great spread of the earth was visible. For a time—I cannot teli how long—we had wholly lost ourselves; going up and down, and turning corners, without getting further. But my father said that we must come right, if we made up our minds to go long enough. We had been in among all shapes, and want of shapes, of dreariness, through and in and out of every thrup and thrum of weariness, scarcely hoping ever more to find our way out and discover memory of men for us, when all of a sudden we saw a grand sight. The day had been dreadfully hot and baffling, with sudden swirls of red dust arising, and driving the great drought into us. To walk had been worse than to drag one's way through a stubbly bed of sting-nettles.

But now the quick sting of the sun was gone, and his power descending in the balance towards the flat places of the land and sea. And suddenly we looked forth upon an immeasurable spread of these.

We stood at the gate of the sandy range, which here, like a vast brown patch, disfigures the beauty of the sierra. On either side, in purple distance, sprang sky-piercing obelisks and vapour-mantled glaciers, spangled with bright snow, and shodden with eternal forest. Before us lay the broad, luxuriant plains of California, chequered with more tints than any other piece of earth can show, sleeping in alluvial ease, and veined with soft blue waters. And through a gap in the brown coast-range, at twenty leagues of distance, a light (so faint as to seem a shadow) hovered above the Pacific.

But none of all this grandeur touched our hearts except the water-gleam. Parched with thirst, I caught my father's arm and tried to urge him on towards the blue enchantment of ecstatic living water. But, to my surprise,

he staggered back, and his face grew as white as the distant snow. I managed to get him to a sandy ledge, with the help of his own endeavours, and there let him rest, and try to speak, while my frightened heart throbbed over his.

'My little child,' he said at last, as if we were fallen back ten years, 'put your hand where I can feel it.'

My hand all the while had been in his, and to let him know where it was it moved. But cold fear stopped my talking.

'My child, I have not been kind to you,' my father slowly spoke again, 'but it has not been from want of love. Some day you will see all this, and some day you will pardon me.'

He laid one heavy arm around me, and forgetting thirst and pain, with the last intensity of eyesight watched the sun departing. To me, I know not how, great awe was everywhere, and sadness. The conical point of the furious sun, which like a barb had pierced us, was broadening into a hazy disk, inefficient, but benevolent. Underneath him depth of night was waiting to come upward (after letting him fall through)

and stain his track with redness. Already the arms of darkness grew in readiness to receive him; his upper arc was pure and keen, but the lower was flaked with atmosphere; a glow of hazy light soon would follow, and one bright glimmer (addressed more to the sky than earth), and after that a broad, soft gleam; and after that how many a man should never see the sun again, and among them would be my father.

He, for the moment, resting there, with heavy light upon him, and the dark jaws of the mountain desert yawning wide behind him, and all the beautiful expanse of liberal earth before him—even so he seemed to me, of all the things in sight, the one that first would draw attention. His face was full of quiet grandeur and impressive calm, and the sad tranquillity which comes to those who know what human life is through continual human death. Although, in the matter of bodily strength, he was little past the prime of life, his long and abundant hair was white, and his broad and upright forehead marked with the meshes of the net of care. But drought, and famine, and long fatigue had failed even

now to change or weaken the fine expression of his large, sad eyes. Those eyes alone would have made the face remarkable among ten thousand, so deep with settled gloom they were, and dark with fatal sorrow. Such eyes might fitly have told the grief of Adrastus, son of Gordias, who having slain his own brother unwitting, unwitting slew the only son of his generous host and saviour.

The pale globe of the sun hung trembling in the haze himself had made. My father rose to see the last, and reared his tall form upright against the deepening background. He gazed as if the course of life lay vanishing below him, while level land and waters drew the breadth of shadow over them. Then the last gleam flowed and fled upon the face of ocean, and my father put his dry lips to my forehead, saying nothing.

His lips might well be dry, for he had not swallowed water for three days; but it frightened me to feel how cold they were, and even tremulous. 'Let us run, let us run, my dear father!' I cried. 'Delicious water! The dark

falls quickly; but we can get there before dark. It is all down-hill. Oh, do let us run at once!'

'Erema,' he answered, with a quiet smile, 'there is no cause now for hurrying, except that I must hurry to show you what you have to do, my child. For once, at the end of my life, I am lucky. We have escaped from that starving desert, at a spot—at a spot where we can see—'

For a little while he could say no more, but sank upon the stony seat, and the hand with which he tried to point some distant landmark fell away. His face, which had been so pale before, became of a deadly whiteness; and he breathed with gasps of agony. I knelt before him and took his hands, and tried to rub the palms, and did whatever I could think of.

'Oh, father, father, you have starved yourself, and given everything to me! What a brute I was to let you do it! But I did not know; I never knew! Please God to take me also.'

He could not manage to answer this, even if he understood it; but he firmly lifted his arm again, and tried to make me follow it.

'What does it matter? Oh, never mind,

never mind such a wretch as I am! Father, only try to tell me what I ought to do for you.'

'My child, my child,' were his only words; and he kept on saying, 'My child, my child,' as if he liked the sound of it.

At what time of the night my father died I knew not then or afterwards. It may have been before the moon came over the snowy mountains, or it may not have been till the worn-out stars in vain repelled the daybreak. All I know is that I ever strove to keep more near to him through the night, to cherish his failing warmth, and quicken the slow, laborious, narassed breath. From time to time he tried to pray to God, for me and for himself; but every time his mind began to wander and to slip away, as if through want of practice. For the chills of many wretched years had deadened and benumbed his faith. He knew me, now and then, betwixt the conflict and the stupor; for more than once he muttered feebly, and as if from out a dream—

'Time for Erema to go on her way. Go on your way, and save your life—save your life, Erema.'

There was no way for me to go, except on my knees before him. I took his hands, and made them lissome with a soft, light rubbing. I whispered into his ear my name, that he might speak once more to me; and when he could not speak, I tried to say what he would say to me.

At last, with a blow that stunned all words, it smote my stupid, wandering mind, that all I had to speak and smile to, all I cared to please and serve, the only one left to admire and love, lay here in my weak arms quite dead. And in the anguish of my sobbing little things came home to me, a thousand little things that showed how quietly he had prepared for this, and provided for me only. Cold despair, and self-reproach, and strong rebellion dazed me, until I lay at my father's side, and slept with his dead hand in mine. There in the desert of desolation pious awe embraced me, and small phantasms of individual fear could not come nigh me.

By and by long shadows of morning crept toward me dismally, and the pallid light of the hills was stretched in weary streaks away from me. How I arose, or what I did, or what I

thought, is nothing now. Such times are not for talking of. How many hearts of anguish lie forlorn, with none to comfort them, with all the joy of life died out, and all the fear of having yet to live, in front arising.

Young, and weak, and wrong of sex for doing any valiance, long I lay by my father's body, wringing out my wretchedness. Thirst and famine now had flown into the opposite extreme; I seemed to loathe the thought of water, and the smell of food would have made me sick. I opened my father's knapsack, and a pang of new misery seized me. There lay nearly all his rations, which he had made pretence to eat, as he gave me mine from time to time. He had starved himself; since he failed of his mark, and learned our risk of famishing, all his own food he had kept for me, as well as his store of water. And I had done nothing but grumble and groan, even while consuming everything. Compared with me, the hovering vultures were as ministering angels.

When I found all this, I was a great deal too worn out to cry or sob. Simply to break

down may be the purest mercy that can fall on truly hopeless misery. Screams of ravenous maws, and flaps of fetid wings, came close to me; and fainting into the arms of death, I tried to save my father's body by throwing my own over it.

CHAPTER III.

A STURDY COLONIST.

For the contrast betwixt that dreadful scene and the one on which my dim eyes slowly opened three days afterwards, first I thank the Lord in heaven, whose gracious care was over me; and after Him some very simple members of humanity.

A bronze-coloured woman, with soft, sad eyes, was looking at me steadfastly. She had seen that, under tender care, I was just beginning to revive, and being acquainted with many troubles, she had learned to succour all of them. This I knew not then, but felt that kindness was around me.

'Arauna, arauna, my shild,' she said, in a strange but sweet and soothing voice; 'you are with the good man in the safe, good house. Let old Suan give you the good food, my shild.'

'Where is my father? Oh, show me my father!' I whispered faintly, as she raised me in the bed and held a large spoon to my lips.

'You shall—you shall—it is too very much Inglese; me tell you when have long Sunday time to think. My shild, take the good food from poor old Suan.'

She looked at me with such beseeching eyes that even if food had been loathsome to me I could not have resisted her; whereas I was now in the quick-reviving agony of starvation. The Indian woman fed me with far greater care than I was worth, and hushed me, with some soothing process, into another abyss of sleep.

More than a week passed by me thus, in the struggle between life and death, before I was able to get clear knowledge of anybody or anything. No one, in my wakeful hours, came into my little bedroom except this careful Indian nurse, who hushed me off to sleep whenever I wanted to ask questions. Suan Isco, as she was called, possessed a more than mesmeric power of soothing a weary frame to rest; and this was seconded, where I lay, by the soft,

incessant cadence and abundant roar of water. Thus every day I recovered strength and natural impatience.

'The master is coming to see you, shild,' Suan said to me one day, when I had sat up, and done my hair, and longed to be down by the waterfall; 'if, if—too much Inglese—old Suan say no more can now.'

'If I am ready, and able, and willing! Oh, Suan, run and tell him not to lose one moment.'

'No sure; Suan no sure at all,' she answered, looking at me calmly, as if there were centuries yet to spare. 'Suan no hurry; shild no hurry; master no hurry; come last of all.'

'I tell you, Suan, I want to see him. And I am not accustomed to be kept waiting. My dear father insisted always—but oh, Suan, Suan, he is dead—I am almost sure of it.'

'Him old man quite dead enough, and big hole dug in the land for him. Very good; more good than could be. Suan no more Inglese.'

Well as I had known it long, a catching of

the breath and hollow, helpless pain came through me—to meet in dry words thus the dread which might have been but a hovering dream. I turned my face to the wall, and begged her not to send the master in.

But presently a large, firm hand was laid on my shoulder softly, and turning sharply round I beheld an elderly man looking down at me. His face was plain, and square, and solid, with short white curls on a rugged forehead, and fresh red cheeks, and a triple chin—fit base for remarkably massive jaws. His frame was in keeping with his face, being very large and powerful, though not of my father's commanding height. His dress and appearance were those of a working—and a really hard-working—man, sober, steadfast, and self-respecting; but what engaged my attention most was the frank yet shrewd gaze of deep-set eyes. I speak of things as I observed them later, for I could not pay much heed just then.

'"Tis a poor little missy,' he said with a gentle tone; 'what things she hath been through! Will you take an old man's hand,

my dear? Your father hath often taken it, though different from his rank of life. Sampson Gundry is my name, missy. Have you ever heard your father tell of it?'

'Many and many a time,' I said, as I placed my hot little hand in his; 'he never found more than one man true on earth, and it was you, sir.'

'Come now,' he replied, with his eyes for a moment sparkling at my warmth of words; 'you must not have that in your young head, missy. It leads to a miserable life. Your father hath always been unlucky—the most unlucky that ever I did know. And luck cometh out in nothing clearer than in the kind of folk we meet. But the Lord in heaven ordereth all. I speak like a poor heathen.'

'Oh, never mind that,' I cried; 'only tell me, were you in time to save—to save—' I could not bear to say what I wanted.

'In plenty of time, my dear, thanks to you. You must have fought when you could not fight; the real stuff, I call it. Your poor father lies where none can harm him. Come,

missy, missy, you must not take on so. It is the best thing that could befall a man so bound up with calamity. It is what he hath prayed for for many a year—if only it were not for you. And now you are safe, and for sure he knows it, if the angels heed their business.'

With these words he withdrew, and kindly sent Suan back to me, knowing that her soothing ways would help me more than argument. To my mind all things lay in deep confusion and abasement. Overcome with bodily weakness, and with bitter self-reproach, I even feared that to ask any questions might show want of gratitude. But a thing of that sort could not always last, and before very long I was quite at home with the history of Mr. Gundry.

Solomon Gundry, of Mevagissey, in the county of Cornwall, in England, betook himself to the United States in the last year of the last century. He had always been a most upright man, as well as a first-rate fisherman; and his family had made a rule—as most respectable families at that time did—to run a nice cargo of contraband goods not more than twice in one

season. A highly querulous old lieutenant of the British navy (who had served under Nelson and lost both arms, yet kept 'the rheumatics' in either stump) was appointed, in an evil hour, to the Cornish coast-guard; and he never rested until he had caught all the best county families smuggling. Through this he lost his situation, and had to go to the workhouse; nevertheless, such a stir had been roused that (to satisfy public opinion) they made a large sacrifice of inferior people, and among them this Solomon Gundry. Now, the Gundries had long been a thick-set race, and had furnished some champion wrestlers; and Solomon kept to the family stamp in the matter of obstinacy. He made a bold mark at the foot of a bond for £150, and with no other sign than that, his partner in their stanch herring smack (the 'Good Hope,' of Mevagissey) allowed him to make sail across the Atlantic with all he cared for.

This Cornish partner deserved to get all his money back; and so he did, together with good interest. Solomon Gundry throve among a thrifty race at Boston; he married a sweet New England

lass, and his eldest son was Sampson. Sampson, in the prime of life, and at its headstrong period, sought the far west, overland, through not much less of distance, and through even more of danger, than his English father had gone through. His name was known on the western side of the mighty chain of mountains before Colonel Fremont was heard of there, and before there was any gleam of gold on the lonely sunset frontage.

Here Sampson Gundry lived by tillage of the nobly fertile soil, ere Sacramento or San Francisco had any name to speak of. And though he did not show regard for any kind of society, he managed to have a wife and son, and keep them free from danger. But (as it appears to me the more, the more I think of everything) no one must assume to be aside the reach of Fortune because he has gathered himself so small that she should not care to strike at him. At any rate, good or evil powers smote Sampson Gundry heavily.

First he lost his wife, which was a 'great denial' to him. She fell from a cliff while she

was pegging out the linen, and the substance of her frame prevented her from ever getting over it. And after that he lost his son, his only son —for all the Gundries were particular as to quality—and the way in which he lost his son made it still more sad for him.

A reputable and valued woman had disappeared in a hasty way from a cattle-place down the same side of the hills. The desire of the Indians was to enlarge her value and get it. There were very few white men as yet within any distance to do good; but Sampson Gundry vowed that, if the will of the Lord went with him, that woman should come back to her family without robbing them of sixpence. To this intent he started with a company of some twenty men—white or black or middle-coloured (according to circumstances). He was their captain, and his son Elijah their lieutenant. Elijah had only been married for a fortnight, but was full of spirit and eager to fight with enemies; and he seems to have carried this too far, for all that came back to his poor bride was a lock of his hair and his blessing. He was

buried in a bed of lava on the western slope of Shasta, and his wife died in her confinement, and was buried by the Blue River.

It was said at the time and long afterwards that Elijah Gundry—thus cut short—was the finest and noblest young man to be found from the mountains to the ocean. His father, in whose arms he died, led a sad and lonely life for years, and scarcely even cared (although of Cornish and New England race) to seize the glorious chance of wealth which lay at his feet beseeching him. By settlement he had possessed himself of a large and fertile district, sloping from the mountain foot along the banks of the swift Blue River, a tributary of the San Joaquim. And this was not all, for he also claimed the ownership of the upper valley, the whole of the mountain-gorge, and spring-head, whence that sparkling water flows. And when that fury of gold-digging in 1849 arose, very few men could have done what he did, without even thinking twice of it.

For Sampson Gundry stood, like a bull, on the banks of his own river, and defied the

worst and most desperate men of all nations to pollute it. He had scarcely any followers or steadfast friends to back him; but his fame for stern courage was clear and strong, and his bodily presence most manifest. Not a shovel was thrust, nor a cradle rocked, in the bed of the Blue River.

But when a year or two had passed, and all the towns and villages, and even hovels and wayside huts, began to clink with money, Mr. Gundry gradually recovered a wholesome desire to have some. For now his grandson Ephraim was growing into biped shape, and having lost his mother when he first came into the world, was sure to need the more natural and maternal nutriment of money.

Therefore Sampson Gundry, though he would not dig for gold, wrought out a plan which he had long thought of. Nature helped him with all her powers of mountain, forest, and headlong stream. He set up a saw-mill, and built it himself; and there was no other to be found for twelve degrees of latitude and perhaps a score of longitude.

CHAPTER IV.

THE 'KING OF THE MOUNTAINS.'

If I think, and try to write for ever with the strongest words, I cannot express to any other mind a thousandth part of the gratitude which was, and is, and ought to be for ever, in my own poor mind towards those who were so good to me. From time to time it is said (whenever any man with power of speech or fancy gets some little grievances) that all mankind are simply selfish, miserly, and miserable. To contradict that saying needs experience even larger, perhaps, than that which has suggested it; and this I cannot have, and therefore only know that I have not found men or women behave at all according to that view of them.

Whether Sampson Gundry owed any debt, either of gratitude or of loyalty, to my father, I

did not ask; and he seemed to be (like every one else) reserved and silent as to my father's history. But he always treated me as if I belonged to a rank of life quite different from and much above his own. For instance, it was long before he would allow me to have my meals at the table of the household.

But as soon as I began in earnest to recover from starvation, loss, and loneliness, my heart was drawn to this grand old man, who had seen so many troubles. He had been here and there in the world so much, and dealt with so many people, that the natural frankness of his mind was sharpened into caution. But any weak and helpless person still could get the best of him; and his shrewdness certainly did not spring from any form of bitterness. He was rough in his ways sometimes, and could not bear to be contradicted when he was sure that he was right, which generally happened to him. But above all things he had one very great peculiarity, to my mind highly vexatious, because it seemed so unaccountable. Sampson Gundry had a very low opinion of feminine

intellect. He never showed this contempt in any unpleasant way, and, indeed, he never perhaps displayed it in any positive sayings. But as I grew older and began to argue, sure I was that it was there; and it always provoked me tenfold as much, by seeming to need no assertion, but to stand as some great axiom.

The other members of the household were his grandson Ephraim (or 'Firm' Gundry), the Indian woman Suan Isco, and a couple of helps of race or nation almost unknown to themselves. Suan Isco belonged to a tribe of respectable Black Rock Indians, and had been the wife of a chief among them, and the mother of several children. But Klamath Indians, enemies of theirs (who carried off the lady of the cattle ranche, and afterwards shot Elijah), had Suan Isco in their possession, having murdered her husband and children, and were using her as a mere beast of burden, when Sampson Gundry fell on them. He, with his followers, being enraged at the cold-blooded death of Elijah, fell on those miscreants to such purpose that

women and children alone were left to hand down their bad propensities.

But the white men rescued and brought away the stolen wife of the stockman, and also the widow of the Black Rock chief. She was in such poor condition, and so broken-hearted, that none but the finest humanity would have considered her worth a quarter of the trouble of her carriage. But she proved to be worth it a thousandfold; and Sawyer Gundry (as now he was called) knew by this time all the value of uncultivated gratitude. And her virtues were so many that it took a long time to find them out, for she never put them forward, not knowing whether they were good or bad.

Until I knew these people, and the pure depth of their kindness, it was a continual grief to me to be a burden upon them. But when I came to understand them and their simple greatness, the only thing I was ashamed of was my own mistrust of them. Not that I expected ever that any harm would be done to me, only that I knew myself to have no claim on any one.

One day, when I was fit for nothing but to dwell on trouble, Sampson Gundry's grandson 'Firm'—as he was called for Ephraim—ran up the stairs to the little room where I was sitting by myself.

'Miss Rema, will you come with us?' he said, in his deep, slow style of speech. 'We are going up the mountain, to haul down the great tree to the mill.'

'To be sure I will come,' I answered gladly. 'What great tree is it, Mr. Ephraim?'

'The largest tree anywhere near here—the one we cut down last winter. Ten days it took to cut it down. If I could have saved it, it should have stood. But grandfather did it to prove his rights. We shall have a rare job to lead it home, and I doubt if we can tackle it. I thought you might like to see us try.'

In less than a minute I was ready, for the warmth and softness of the air made cloak or shawl unbearable. But when I ran down to the yard of the mill, Mr. Gundry, who was giving orders, came up and gave me an order too.

'You must not go like this, my dear. We have three thousand feet to go upward. The air will be sharp up there, and I doubt if we shall be home by nightfall. Run, Suan, and fetch the young lady's cloak, and a pair of thicker boots for change.'

Suan Isco never ran. That manner of motion was foreign to her, at least as we accomplish it. When speed was required, she attained it by increased length of stride and great vigour of heel. In this way she conquered distance steadily, and with very little noise.

The air, and the light, and the beauty of the mountains were a sudden joy to me. In front of us all strode Sampson Gundry, clearing all tangles with a short, sharp axe, and mounting steep places as if two score were struck off his three score years and five. From time to time he turned round to laugh, or see that his men and trained bullocks were right; and then, as his bright eyes met my dark ones, he seemed to be sorry for the noise he made. On the other hand, I was ashamed of damping any one's pleasure by being there.

But I need not have felt any fear about this. Like all other children, I wrapped myself up too much in my own importance, and behaved as if my state of mind was a thing to be considered. But the longer we rose through the freedom and the height, the lighter grew the heart of every one, until the thick forest of pines closed round us, and we walked in a silence that might be felt.

Hence we issued forth upon the rough, bare rock, and after much trouble with the cattle, and some bruises, stood panting on a rugged cone, or crest, which had once been crowned with a Titan of a tree. The tree was still there, but not its glory; for, alas! the mighty trunk lay prostrate, a grander column than ever was, or will be, built by human hands. The tapering shaft stretched out of sight for something like a furlong, and the bulk of the butt rose over us so that we could not see the mountains. Having never seen any such tree before, I must have been amazed if I had been old enough to comprehend it.

Sampson Gundry, large as he was, and ac

customed to almost everything, collected his men and the whole of his team on the ground-floor or area of the stump, before he would say anything. Here we all looked so sadly small that several of the men began to laugh; the bullocks seemed nothing but racoons, or beavers, to run on the branches or the fibres of the tree; and the chains and the shackles, and the blocks and cranes, and all the rest of the things they meant to use, seemed nothing whatever, or at all to be considered, except as a spider's web upon this tree.

The sagacious bullocks, who knew quite well what they were expected to do, looked blank. Some rubbed their horns into one another's sadly, and some cocked their tails because they felt that they could not be called upon to work. The light of the afternoon sun came glancing along the vast pillar, and lit its dying hues—cinnamon, purple, and glabrous red, and soft grey where the lichens grew.

Everybody looked at Mr. Gundry, and he began to cough a little, having had lately some trouble with his throat. Then in his sturdy

manner he spoke the truth, according to his nature. He set his great square shoulders against the butt of the tree, and delivered himself—

'Friends and neighbours, and hands of my own, I am taken in here, and I own to it. It serves me right for disbelieving what my grandson, Firm Gundry, said. I knew that the tree was a big one, of course, as everybody else does; but till you see a tree laid upon earth you get no grip of his girth, no more than you do of a man till he lieth a corpse. At the time of felling I could not come anigh him, by reason of an accident; and I had some words with this boy about it, which kept me away ever since that time. Firm, you were right, and I was wrong. It was a real shame, now I see it, to throw down the "King of the Mountains." But for all that, being down, we must use him. He shall be sawn into fifty-foot lengths. And I invite you all to come again, for six or seven good turns at him.'

At the hearing of this a cheer arose, not only for the Sawyer's manly truth, but also for his

hospitality; because on each of these visits to the mountain he was the host, and his supplies were good. But before the descent with the empty teams began, young Ephraim did what appeared to me to be a gallant and straightforward thing. He stood on the chine of the fallen monster, forty feet above us, having gained the post of vantage by activity and strength, and he asked if he might say a word or two.

'Say away, lad,' cried his grandfather, supposing, perhaps, in his obstinate way—for truly he was very obstinate—that his grandson was going now to clear himself from art or part in the murder of that tree, an act which had roused indignation over a hundred leagues of lowland.

'Neighbours,' said Firm, in a clear young voice, which shook at first with diffidence, 'we all have to thank you, more than I can tell, for coming to help us with this job. It was a job which required to be done for legal reasons which I do not understand, but no doubt they were good ones. For that we have my grandfather's word; and no one, I think, will gainsay

it. Now, having gone so far, we will not be beaten by it, or else we shall not be Americans.'

These simple words were received with great applause; and an orator, standing on the largest stump to be found even in America, delivered a speech which was very good to hear, but need not now be repeated. And Mr. Gundry's eyes were moist with pleasure at his grandson's conduct.

'Firm knoweth the right thing to do,' he said; 'and like a man he doeth it. But whatever aileth you, Miss Rema, and what can'e see in the distance yonner? Never mind, my dear, then. Tell me by-and-by, when none of these folk is 'longside of us.'

But I could not bear to tell him, till he forced it from me under pain of his displeasure. I had spied on the sky-line far above us, in the desert track of mountain, the very gap in which my father stood and bade me seek this landmark. His memory was true, and his eyesight also; but the great tree had been felled. The death of the 'King of the Mountains' had led to the death of the king of mankind, so far as my little world contained one.

CHAPTER V.

UNCLE SAM.

The influence of the place in which I lived began to grow on me. The warmth of the climate, and the clouds of soft and fertile dust, were broken by the refreshing rush of water, and the clear, soft green of leaves. We had fruit-trees of almost every kind, from the peach to the amber cherry, and countless oaks by the side of the river—not large, but most fantastic. Here I used to sit and wonder, in a foolish, childish way, whether on earth there was any other child so strangely placed as I was. Of course there were thousands far worse off, more desolate and destitute, but was there any more thickly wrapped in mystery and loneliness?

A wanderer as I had been for years, together with my father, change of place had not supplied the knowledge which flows from lapse of

time. Faith, and warmth, and trust in others had not been dashed out of me by any rude blows of the world, as happens with unlucky children huddled together in large cities. My father had never allowed me much acquaintance with other children; for six years he had left me with a community of lay sisters, in a little town of Languedoc, where I was the only pupil, and where I was to remain as I was born, a simple heretic. Those sisters were very good to me, and taught me as much as I could take of secular accomplishment. And it was a bitter day for me when I left them for America.

For during those six years I had seen my father at long intervals, and had almost forgotten the earlier days when I was always with him. I used to be the one little comfort of his perpetual wanderings, when I was a careless child, and said things to amuse him. Not that he ever played with me any more than he played with anything; but I was the last of his seven children, and he liked to watch me grow. I never knew it, I never guessed it, until he gave his life for mine; but, poor little common

thing as I was, I became his only tie to earth. Even to me he was never loving, in the way some fathers are. He never called me by pet names, nor dandled me on his knee, nor kissed me, nor stroked down my hair and smiled. Such things I never expected of him, and therefore never missed them; I did not even know that happy children always have them.

But one thing I knew, which is not always known to happier children—I had the pleasure of knowing my own name. My name was an English one—Castlewood—and by birth I was an English girl, though of England I knew nothing, and at one time spoke and thought most easily in French. But my longing had always been for England, and for the sound of English voices and the quietude of English ways. In the chatter, and heat, and drought of South France some faint remembrance of a greener, cooler, and more silent country seemed to touch me now and then. But where in England I had lived, or when I had left that country, or whether I had relations there, and why I was doomed to be a foreign girl—all these questions

were but as curling wisps of cloud on memory's sky.

Of such things (much as I longed to know a good deal more about them) I never had dared to ask my father; nor even could I, in a roundabout way, such as clever children have, get secondhand information. In the first place, I was not a clever child; for the next point, I never had underhand skill; and, finally, there was no one near me who knew anything about it. Like all other girls—and perhaps the very same tendency is to be found in boys—I had strong, though hazy, ideas of caste. The noble sense of equality, fraternity, and so on, seems to come later in life than childhood, which is an age of ambition. I did not know who in the world I was, but felt quite sure of being somebody.

One day, when the great tree had been sawn into lengths, and with the aid of many teams brought home, and the pits and the hoisting tackle were being prepared and strengthened to deal with it, Mr. Gundry, being full of the subject, declared that he would have his dinner

in the mill-yard. He was anxious to watch, without loss of time, the settlement of some heavy timbers newly sunk in the river's bed, to defend the outworks of the mill. Having his good leave to bring him his pipe, I found him sitting upon a bench with a level fixed before him, and his empty plate and cup laid by, among a great litter of tools and things. He was looking along the level with one eye shut, and the other most sternly intent; but when I came near, he rose and raised his broad pith-hat, and made me think that I was not interrupting him.

'Here is your pipe, Uncle Sam,' I said; for, in spite of all his formal ways, I would not be afraid of him. I had known him now quite long enough to be sure that he was good and kind. And I knew that the world around these parts was divided into two hemispheres; the better half being of those who loved, and the baser half made of those who hated, Sawyer Sampson Gundry.

'What a queer world it is,' said Mr. Gundry, accepting his pipe to consider that point. 'Who ever would have dreamed, fifty years agone, that

your father's daughter would ever have come with a pipe to light for my father's son?'

'Uncle Sam,' I replied, as he slowly began to make those puffs which seem to be of the highest essence of pleasure, and wisps of blue smoke flitted through his white eyebrows and among the snowy curls of hair; 'dear Uncle Sam, I am sure that it would be an honour to a princess to light a pipe for a man like you.'

'Miss Rema, I should rather you would talk no nonsense,' he answered very shortly, and he set his eye along his level, as if I had offended him. Not knowing how to assert myself, and declare that I had spoken my honest thoughts, I merely sat down on the bench and waited for him to speak again to me. But he made believe to be very busy, and scarcely to know that I was there. I had a great mind to cry, but resolved not to do it.

'Why, how is this? What's the matter?' he exclaimed at last, when I had been watching the water so long that I sighed to know where it was going to. 'Why, missy, you look as if you had never a friend in all the wide world left.'

'Then I must look very ungrateful,' I said; 'for at any rate I have one, and a good one.'

'And don't you know of anyone but me, my dear?'

'You, and Suan Isco, and Firm—those are all I have any knowledge of.'

''Tis a plenty—to my mind almost too many. My plan is to be a good friend to all, but not let too many be friends with me. Rest you quite satisfied with three, Miss Rema. I have lived a good many years, and I never had more than three friends worth a puff of my pipe.'

'But one's own relations, Uncle Sam, people quite nearly related to us; it is impossible for them to be unkind, you know.'

'Do I, my dear? Then I wish that I did. Except one's own father and mother, there is not much to be hoped for out of them. My own brother took a twist against me because I tried to save him from ruin; and if any man ever wished me ill, he did. And I think that your father had the same tale to tell—but there, I know nothing whatever about that.'

'Now, you do, Mr. Gundry; I am certain

that you do, and beg you to tell me; or rather I demand it. I am old enough now, and I am certain my dear father would have wished me to know everything. Whatever it was, I am sure that he was right; and until I know that I shall always be the most miserable of the miserable.'

The Sawyer looked at me as if he could not enter into my meaning, and his broad, short nose and quiet eyes were beset with wrinkles of inquiry. He quite forgot his level and his great post in the river, and tilted back his ancient hat, and let his pipe rest on his big brown arm. 'Lord bless me!' he said, 'what a young gal you are! Or, at least, what a young Miss Rema. What good can you do, miss, by making of a rout? Here you be in as quiet a place as you could find, and all of us likes and pities you. Your father was a wise man to settle you here in this enlightened continent. Let the doggoned old folk t'other side of the world think out their own flustrations. A female young American you are now, and a very fine specimen you will grow. 'Tis the finest thing to be on all God's earth.'

'No, Mr. Gundry, I am an English girl, and I mean to be an English woman. The Americans may be more kind and generous, and perhaps my father thought so, and brought me here for that reason. And I may be glad to come back to you again when I have done what I am bound to do. Remember that I am the last of seven children, and do not even know where the rest are buried.'

'Now, look straight afore you, missy. What do you see yonner?' The Sawyer was getting a little tired, perhaps, of this long interruption.

'I see enormous logs, and a quantity of saws, and tools I don't even know the names of. Also I see a bright, swift river.'

'But over here, missy, between them two oaks. What do you please to see there, Miss Rema?'

'What I see there, of course, is a great saw-mill.'

'But it wouldn't have been "of course," and it wouldn't have been at all, if I had spent all my days a-dwelling on the injuries of my family. Could I have put that there unekalled

sample of water-power and human ingenuity together without labouring hard for whole months of a stretch, except upon the Sabbath, and laying awake night after night, and bending all my intellect over it? And could I have done that, think you now, if my heart was a-mooning upon family wrongs, and this, that, and the other?'

Here Sampson Gundry turned full upon me, and folded his arms, and spread his great chin upon his deer-skin apron, and nodded briskly with his deep grey eyes, surveying me in triumph. To his mind, that mill was the wonder of the world, and any argument based upon it, with or without coherence, was, like its circular saws, irresistible. And yet he thought that woman cannot reason! However, I did not say another word just then, but gave way to him, as behoved a child. And not only that, but I always found him too good to be argued with—too kind, I mean, and large of heart, and wedded to his own peculiar turns. There was nothing about him that one could dislike, or strike fire at, and be captious; and he always

proceeded with such pity for those who were opposed to him, that they always knew they must be wrong, though he was too polite to tell them so. And he had such a pleasant, paternal way of looking down into one's little thoughts when he put on his spectacles, that to say any more was to hazard the risk of ungrateful inexperience.

CHAPTER VI.

A BRITISHER.

The beautiful Blue River came from the jagged depths of the mountains, full of light and liveliness. It had scarcely run six miles from its source before it touched our mill-wheel; but in that space and time it had gathered strong and copious volume. The lovely blue of the water (like the inner tint of a glacier) was partly due to its origin, perhaps, and partly to the rich, soft tone of the granite sand spread under it. Whatever the cause may have been, the river well deserved its title.

It was so bright and pure a blue, so limpid and pellucid, that it even seemed to outvie the tint of the sky which it reflected; and the myriad sparks of sunshine on it twinkled like a crystal rain. Plodding through the parched and scorching dust of the mountain-foot,

through the stifling vapour and the blinding, ochrous glare, the traveller suddenly came upon this cool and calm delight. It was not to be descried afar, for it lay below the level; and the oaks and other trees of shelter scarcely topped the narrow combe. There was no *cañon* (such as are, and some of them known over all the world, both to the north and south of it). The Blue River did not owe its birth to any fierce convulsion, but sparkled on its cheerful way without impending horrors. Standing here as a child, and thinking, from the manner of my father, that strong men never wept nor owned the conquest of emotion, I felt sometimes a fool's contempt for the gushing transport of brave men. For instance, I have seen a miner, or a tamer of horses, or a rough fur-hunter, or (perhaps the bravest of all) a man of science and topography, jaded, worn, and nearly dead with drought and dearth and choking, suddenly, and beyond all hope, strike on this buried Eden. And then he dropped on his knees and spread his starved hands upwards, if he could, and thanked the God who made him, till his head

went round, and who knows what remembrance of loved ones came to him? And then if he had any moisture left, he fell to a passion of weeping.

In childish ignorance I thought that this man weakly degraded himself, and should have been born a woman. But since that time I have truly learned that the bravest of men are those who feel their Maker's hand most softly, and are not ashamed to pay the tribute of their weakness to Him.

Living, as we did, in a lonely place, and yet not far from a track along the crest of the great Californian plain from Sacramento southward, there was scarcely a week which did not bring us some traveller needing comfort. Mr. Gundry used to be told that if he would set up a rough hotel, or house of call for cattle-drovers, miners, loafers, and so on, he might turn twice the money he could ever make by his thriving sawmill. But he only used to laugh, and say that nature had made him too honest for that; and he never thought of charging anything for his hospitality, though if a rich man left a gold piece, or even

a nugget, upon a shelf, as happened very often, Sawyer Gundry did not disdain to set it aside for a rainy day. And one of his richest or most lavish guests arrived on my account, perhaps.

It happened when daylight was growing shorter, and the red heat of the earth was gone, and the snow-line of distant granite peaks had crept already lower, and the chattering birds that spent their summer in our band of oak trees were beginning to find their food get short, and to prime swift wings for the lowland; and I, having never felt bitter cold, was trembling at what I heard of it. For now it was clear that I had no choice but to stay where I was for the present, and be truly thankful to God and man for having the chance of doing so. For the little relics of my affairs—so far as I had any—had taken much time in arrangement, perhaps because it was so hard to find them. I knew nothing except about my own little common wardrobe, and could give no information about the contents of my father's packages. But these, by dint of perseverance on the part of Ephraim (who was very keen about all

rights), had mainly been recovered, and Mr. Gundry had done the best that could be done concerning them. Whatever seemed of a private nature, or likely to prove important, had been brought home to Blue River Mills; the rest had been sold, and had fetched large prices, unless Mr. Gundry enlarged them.

He more than enlarged, he multiplied them, as I found out long afterwards, to make me think myself rich and grand, while a beggar upon his bounty. I had never been accustomed to think of money, and felt some little contempt for it—not indeed a lofty hatred, but a careless wonder why it seemed to be always thought of. It was one of the last things I ever thought of; and those who were waiting for it were—until I got used to them—obliged in self-duty to remind me.

This, however, was not my fault. I never dreamed of wronging them. But I had earned no practical knowledge of the great world anywhere, much though I had wandered about, according to vague recollections. The duty of paying had never been mine. That important

part had been done for me. And my father had such a horror always of any growth of avarice, that he never gave me sixpence.

And now when I heard upon every side continual talk of money, from Suan Isco upward, I thought at first that the new world must be different from the old one, and that the gold mines in the neighbourhood must have made them full of it; and once or twice I asked Uncle Sam; but he only nodded his head, and said that it was the practice everywhere. And before very long I began to perceive that he did not exaggerate.

Nothing could prove this point more clearly than the circumstance above referred to—the arrival of a stranger, for the purpose of bribing even Uncle Sam himself. This happened in the month of November, when the passes were beginning to be blocked with snow, and those of the higher mountain tracts had long been overwhelmed with it. On this particular day the air was laden with grey, oppressive clouds, threatening a heavy downfall, and instead of faring forth, as usual, to my beloved river, I

was kept indoors, and even upstairs, by a violent snow-headache. This is a crushing weight of pain, which all new-comers, or almost all, are obliged to endure, sometimes for as much as eight-and-forty hours, when the first great snow of the winter is breeding, as they express it, overhead. But I was more lucky than most people are; for after about twelve hours of almost intolerable throbbing, during which the sweetest sound was odious, and the idea of food quite loathsome, the agony left me, and a great desire for something to eat succeeded. Suan Isco, the kindest of the kind, was gone downstairs at last, for which I felt ungrateful gratitude—because she had been doing her best to charm away my pain by low, monotonous Indian ditties, which made it ten times worse; and yet I could not find heart to tell her so.

Now, it must have been past six o'clock in the evening of the November day when the avalanche slid off my head, and I was able to lift it. The light of the west had been faint, and was dead; though often it used to prolong

our day by the backward glance of the ocean. With pangs of youthful hunger, but a head still weak and dazy, I groped my way in the dark through the passage and down the stairs of redwood.

At the bottom, where a railed landing was, and the door opened into the house-room, I was surprised to find that, instead of the usual cheerful company enjoying themselves by the firelight, there were only two people present. The Sawyer sat stiffly in his chair of state, delaying even the indulgence of his pipe, and having his face set sternly, as I had never before beheld it. In the visitor's corner, as we called it, where people sat to dry themselves, there was a man, and only one.

Something told me that I had better keep back and not disturb them. The room was not in its usual state of comfort and hospitality. Some kind of meal had been made at the table, as always must be in these parts; but not of the genial, reckless sort which random travellers carried on without any check from the Sawyer. For he of all men ever born in a civilised age

was the finest host, and a guest beneath his roof was sacred as a lady to a knight. Hence it happened that I was much surprised. Proper conduct almost compelled me to withdraw; but curiosity made me take just one more little peep, perhaps. Looking back at these things now, I cannot be sure of everything; and, indeed, if I could, I must have an almost supernatural memory. But I remember many things; and the headache may have cleared my mind.

The stranger, who had brought Mr. Gundry's humour into such stiff condition, was sitting in the corner, a nook where light and shadow made an eddy. He seemed to be perfectly unconcerned about all the tricks of the hearth-flame, presenting as he did a most solid face for any light to play upon. To me it seemed to be a weather-beaten face of a bluff and resolute man, the like of which we attribute to John Bull. At any rate, he was like John Bull in one respect; he was sturdy and square, and fit to hold his own with any man.

Strangers of this sort had come (as Englishmen rove everywhere), and been kindly wel-

comed by Uncle Sam, who, being of recent English blood, had a kind of hankering after it, and would almost rather have such at his board than even a true-born American; and infinitely more welcome were they than Frenchman, Spaniard, or German, or any man not to be distinguished, as was the case with some of them. Even now it was clear that the Sawyer had not grudged any tokens of honour, for the tall, square brazen candlesticks, of Boston make, were on the table, and very little light they gave. The fire, however, was grandly roaring of stub-oak and pine antlers, and the black grill of the chimney-bricks was fringed with lifting filaments. It was a rich, ripe light, affording breadth and play for shadow; and the faces of the two men glistened, and darkened in their creases.

I was dressed in black, and could not be seen, though I could see them so clearly; and I doubted whether to pass through, upon my way to the larder, or return to my room and starve a little longer; for I did not wish to interrupt, and had no idea of listening. But suddenly I was compelled to stop; and to listen

became an honest thing, when I knew what was spoken of; or, at any rate, I did it.

'Castlewood, Master Colonist; Castlewood is the name of the man that I have come to ask about. And you will find it worth your while to tell me all you know of him.' Thus spoke the Englishman sitting in the corner; and he seemed to be certain of producing his effect.

'Wal,' said Uncle Sam, assuming what all true Britons believe to be the universal Yankee tone, while I knew that he was laughing in his sleeve, 'Squire, I guess that you may be right. Considerations of that 'ere kind desarves to be considered of.'

'Just so. I knew that you must see it,' the stranger continued bravely. 'A stiff upper lip, as you call it here, is all very well to begin with. But all you enlightened members of the great republic know what is what. It will bring you more than ten years' income of your saw-mill, and farm and so on, to deal honestly with me for ten minutes. No more beating about the bush and fencing with me, as you have done. Now, can you see your own interest?'

'I never were reckoned a fool at that. Squire, make tracks, and be done with it.'

'Then, Master Colonist, or Colonel—for I believe you are all colonels here—your task is very simple. We want clear proof, sworn properly, and attested duly, of the death of a villain—George Castlewood, otherwise the Honourable George Castlewood, otherwise Lord Castlewood. A man who murdered his own father, ten years ago this November. A man committed for trial for the crime, but who bribed his gaolers and escaped, and wandered all over the continent. What is that noise? Have you got rats?'

'Plenty of foreign rats, and native coons, and skunks, and other varmint. Wal, Squire, go on with it.'

The voice of Uncle Sam was stern, and his face full of rising fury, as I, who had made that noise in my horror, tried to hush my heart with patience.

'The story is well known,' continued the stranger; 'we need make no bones of it. George Castlewood went about under a curse—'

'Not quite so loud, Squire, if you please. My household is not altogether seasoned.'

'And perhaps you have got the young lady somewhere. I heard a report to that effect. But here you think nothing of a dozen murders. Now, Gundry, let us have no squeamishness. We only want justice, and we can pay for it. Ten thousand dollars I am authorised to offer for a mere act of duty on your part. We have an extradition treaty. If the man had been alive we must have had him. But as he has cheated the hangman by dying, we can only see his grave and have evidence. And all well-disposed people must rejoice to have such a quiet end of it. For the family is so well known, you see.'

'I see,' Mr. Gundry answered quietly, laying a finger on his lips. 'Guess you want something more than that, though, Squire. Is there nothing more than the grave to oblige a noble Britisher with?'

'Yes, Colonel; we want the girl as well. We know that she was with him in that caravan, or waggon-train, or whatever you please

to call it. We know that you have made oath of his death, produced his child, and obtained his trunks, and drawn his share in the insurance job. Your laws must be queer to let you do such things. In England it would have taken at least three years, and cost a deal more than the things were worth, even without a Chancery suit. However, of his papers I shall take possession; they can be of no earthly use to you.'

'To be sure. And possession of his darter too, without so much as a Chancery suit. But what is to satisfy me, Squire, agin' goin' wrong in this little transaction?'

'I can very soon satisfy you,' said the stranger, 'as to their identity. Here is their full, particular, and correct description—names, weights, and colours of the parties.'

With a broad grin at his own exquisite wit, the bluff man drew forth his pocket-book, and took out a paper, which he began to smoothe on his knee quite leisurely. Meanwhile, in my hiding-place, I was trembling with terror and indignation. The sense of eavesdropping was

wholly lost in that of my own jeopardy. I must know what was arranged about me ; for I felt such a hatred and fear of that stranger, that sooner than be surrendered to him I would rush back to my room and jump out of the window, and trust myself to the trackless forest and the snowy night. I was very nearly doing so, but just had sense enough to wait and hear what would be said of me. So I lurked in the darkness, behind the rails, while the stranger read slowly and pompously.

CHAPTER VII.

DISCOMFITURE.

The Englishman drew forth a double eye-glass from a red velvet waistcoat, and mounting it on his broad nose, came nearer to get the full light of the candles. I saw him as clearly as I could wish, and, indeed, a great deal too clearly; for the more I saw of the man the more I shrank from the thought of being in his power. Not that he seemed to be brutal or fierce, but selfish, and resolute, and hard-hearted, and scornful of lofty feelings. Short dust-coloured hair and frizzly whiskers framed his large, thick-featured face, and wearing no moustache he showed the clumsy sneer of a wide, coarse mouth. I watched him with all my eyes, because of his tone of authority about myself. He might even be my guardian, or my father's nearest relation—though he seemed to be too ill-bred for that.

'Sorry to keep you waiting, Colonel,' he went on in a patronising tone, such as he had assumed throughout. 'Here it is. Now prick your ears up, and see if these candid remarks apply. I am reading from a printed form you see :—

'"George Castlewood is forty-eight years old, but looks, perhaps, ten years older. His height is over six feet two, and he does not stoop or slouch at all. His hair is long and abundant, but white ; his eyes are dark, piercing, and gloomy. His features are fine, and of Italian cast, but stern, morose, and forbidding, and he never uses razor. On the back of his left hand, near the wrist, there is a broad scar. He dresses in half-mourning always, and never wears any jewellery, but strictly shuns all society, and prefers uncivilised regions. He never stays long in any town, and follows no occupation, though his aspect and carriage are military, as he has been a cavalry officer. From time to time he has been heard of in Europe, Asia, and Africa, and is now believed to be in America.

'"His only surviving child, a girl of about fifteen, has been seen with him. She is tall and slight, and very straight, and speaks French better than English. Her hair is very nearly black, and her eyes of unusual size and lustre. She is shy, and appears to have been kept under, and she has a timid smile. Whether she knows of her father's crime or not is quite uncertain; but she follows him like a dog almost."

'There now, Colonel,' cried the Englishman, as he folded the paper triumphantly; 'most of that came from my information, though I never set eyes upon the child. Does the cap fit or not, Brother Jonathan?'

Mr. Gundry was leaning back in his own corner, with a favourite pipe, carved by himself, reposing on his waistcoat. And being thus appealed to, he looked up and rubbed his eyes, as if he had been dozing, though he never had been more wide awake, as I, who knew his attitudes, could tell. And my eyes filled with tears of love and shame; for I knew by the mere turn of his chin that he never would surrender me.

'Stranger,' he said, in a most provoking drawl, 'a hard day's work tells its tale on me, you bet. You do read so bootiful, you read me hard asleep. And the gutturals of that furrin English is always a little hard to catch. Mought I trouble you just to go through it again? You likes the sound of your own voice; and no blame to you, being such a swate un.'

The Englishman looked at him keenly, as if he had some suspicion of being chaffed; but the face of the Sawyer was so grave, and the bend of his head so courteous, that he could not refuse to do as he was asked. But he glanced first at the whiskey bottle standing between the candlesticks; and I knew that it boded ill for his errand when Uncle Sam, the most hospitable of men, feigned pure incomprehension of that glance. The man should have no more under that roof.

With a sullen air and a muttered curse, at which Mr. Gundry blew a wreath of smoke, the stranger unfolded his paper again, and saying, 'Now I beg you to attend this time,' read the whole of his description, with much emphasis,

again; while the Sawyer turned away and beat time upon the hearth, with his white hair, broad shoulders, and red ears prominent. The Englishman looked very seriously vexed, but went through his business doggedly. 'Are you satisfied now?' he asked, when he had finished.

'Wal now, Squire,' replied Uncle Sam, still keeping up his provoking drawl, but turning round and looking at the stranger very steadfastly, 'some thin's is so pooty and so .ilegantly done, they seems a'most as good as well-slung flap-jacks. A natteral honest stomick can't nohow have enough of them. Mought I be so bold, in a silly, mountaneous sort of a way, as to ax for another heerin' of it?'

'Do you mean to insult me, sir?' shouted the visitor, leaping up with a flaming face, and throwing himself into an attitude of attack.

'Stranger, I mought,' answered Mr. Gundry, standing squarely before him, and keeping his hands contemptuously behind his back—'I mought so do, barrin' one little point. The cutest commissioner in all the West would have to report "Non compos," if his orders was to

diskiver somethin' capable of bein' insulted in a fellow of your natur'.'

With these words Uncle Sam sat down, and powerfully closed his mouth, signifying that now the matter was taken through every phase of discussion, and had been thoroughly exhausted. His visitor stared at him for a moment, as if at some strange phenomenon, and then fell back into self-command, without attempting bluster.

'Colonel, you are a "cure," as we call it on our side of the herring-pond. What have I done to "riz your dander," as you elegantly express it here?'

'Britisher, nothing. You know no better. It takes more than that to put my back up. But forty years agone I do believe I must a' heaved you out o' window.'

'Why, Colonel, why? Now be reasonable. Not a word have I said reflecting either upon you or your young country; and a finer offer than I have made cannot come to many of you, even in this land of gold. Ten thousand dollars I offer, and I will exceed my instructions and say fifteen, all paid on the nail by an order on

Frisco, about which you may assure yourself. And what do I ask in return? Legal proof of the death of a man whom we know to be dead, and the custody of his child, for her own good.'

'Squire, I have no other answer to make. If you offered me all the gold dug in these mountains since they were discovered, I could only say what I have said before. You came from Sylvester's ranche—there is time for you to get back ere the snow begins.'

'What a hospitable man you are! Upon my word, Gundry, you deserve to have a medal from our Humane Society. You propose to turn me out of doors to-night, with a great fall of snow impending?'

'Sir, the fault is entirely your own. What hospitality can you expect after coming to buy my guest? If you are afraid of the ten-mile ride, my man at the mill will bed you. But here you must not sleep, because I might harm you in the morning. I am apt to lose my temper sometimes, when I go on to think of things.'

'Colonel, I think I had better ride back. I fear no man, nor his temper, nor crotchets.

But if I were snowed up at your mill, I never might cross the hill-foot for months; but from Sylvester's I can always get to Minto. You refuse, then, to help me in any way?'

'More than that. I will do my very utmost to stop such villany. If any one comes prowling after that young lady, he shall be shot.'

'That is most discouraging. However, you may think better of it. Write to this address if you do. You have the girl here, of course?'

'That is her concern and mine. Does your guide know the way right well? The snow is beginning. You do not know our snows, any more than you know us.'

'Never mind, Mr. Gundry. I shall do very well. You are rough in your ways, but you mean to do the right; and your indignation is virtuous. But mark my words upon one little point. If George Castlewood had been living, I have such credentials that I would have dragged him back with me, in spite of all your bluster. But over his corpse I have no control, in the present condition of treaties. Neither can I meddle with his daughter, if it were

worth while to do so. Keep her and make the best of her, my man. You have taken a snake in the grass to your bosom, if that is what you are up for. A very handsome girl she may be, but a bad lot, as her father was. If you wish the name of Gundry to have its due respect hereafter, let the heir of the sawmills have nothing to do with the Honourable Miss Castlewood.'

'Let alone, let alone,' Uncle Sam said angrily. 'It is well for you that the "heir of the sawmills" hath not heard your insolence. Firm is a steady lad; but he knoweth well which foot to kick with. No fear of losing the way to Sylvester's ranche with Firm behind you. But, meddlesome as you be, and a bitter weed to my experience, it shall not be said that Sampson Gundry sent forth a fellow to be frozen. Drink a glass of hot whiskey before you get to saddle. Not in friendship, mind you, sir, but in common human nature.'

That execrable man complied, for he began to be doubtful of the driving snow, now huddling against the window-frames. And so he

went out; and when he was gone, I came forth into the firelight, and threw my arms round the Sawyer's neck and kissed him till he was ashamed of me.

'Miss Rema, my dear, my poor little soul, what makes you carry on so?'

'Because I have heard every word, Uncle Sam, and I was base enough to doubt you.'

CHAPTER VIII.

A DOUBTFUL LOSS.

When I tried to look out of my window in the morning, I was quite astonished at the state of things. To look out fairly was impossible; for not only was all the lower part of the frame hillocked up like a sand-glass, and the sides filled in with dusky plaits, but even in the middle, where some outlook was, it led to very little. All the air seemed choked with snow, and the ground coming up in piles to meet it; all sounds were deadened in the thick grey hush, and nothing had its own proportion. Never having seen such a thing before, I was frightened, and longed to know more of it.

Mr. Gundry had a good laugh at me, in which even Suan Isco joined, when I proposed to sweep a path to the mill, and keep it open through the winter.

'It can be done, I am sure it can,' I

exclaimed with vigorous ignorance. 'May I do it if I can? It only requires perseverance. If you keep on sweeping as fast as it falls, you must overcome it. Don't you see, Uncle Sam?'

'To be sure I do, Miss Rema, as plain as any pikestaff. Suan, fetch a double bundle of new brooms from top-loft, and don't forget while you be up there to give special orders—no snow is to fall at night, or when missy is at dinner.'

'You may laugh as much as you please, Uncle Sam, but I intend to try it. I must try to keep my path to—somewhere.'

'What a fool I am, to be sure!' said Mr. Gundry softly. 'There now, I beg your pardon, my dear, for never giving a thought to it. Firm and I will do it for you, as long as the Lord allows of it. Why, the snow is two foot deep a'ready, and twenty foot in places. I wonder whether that rogue of a Goad got home to Sylvester's ranche last night. No fault of mine if he never did, for go he would in spite of me.'

I had not been thinking of Mr. Goad, and indeed I did not know his name, until it was told in this way. My mind was dwelling on my father's grave, where I used to love to sit and think; and I could not bear the idea of the cold snow lying over it, with nobody coming to care for him. Kind hands had borne him down the mountains (while I lay between life and death) and buried him in the soft peach orchard, in the soothing sound of the mill-wheel. Here had been planted above his head a cross of white unpainted wood, bearing only his initials, and a small 'Amen' below them.

With this I was quite content, believing that he would have wished no better, being a very independent man, and desirous of no kind of pomp. There was no 'consecrated ground' within miles and miles of travelling; but I hoped that he might rest as well with simple tears to hallow it. For often and often, even now, I could not help giving way and sobbing, when I thought how sad it was that a strong, commanding, mighty man, of great will and large experience, should drop in a corner of the

world and die, and finally be thought lucky—when he could think for himself no longer—to obtain a tranquil unknown grave, and end with his initials, and have a water-wheel to sing to him. Many a time it set me crying, and made me long to lie down with him, until I thought of earth-worms.

All that could be done was done by Sampson and Firm Gundry, to let me have my clear path, and a clear bourne at the end of it. But even with a steam snow-shovel they could not have kept the way unstopped; such solid masses of the mountain clouds now descended over us. And never had I been so humoured in my foolish wishes; I was quite ashamed to see the trouble great men took to please me.

'Well, I am sorry to hear it, Firm,' said the Sawyer, coming in one day, with clouts of snow in his snowy curls. 'Not that I care a cent for the fellow—and an impudenter fellow never sucked a pipe. Still he might have had time to mend, if his time had been as good as the room for it. However, no blame rests on us. I told him to bed down to sawmill. They Englishmen

never know when they are well off. But the horse got home, they tell me?'

'The horse got home all right, grandfather, and so did the other horse and man. But Sylvester thinks that a pile of dollars must have died out in the snow-drift. It is a queer story. We shall never know the rights.'

'How many times did I tell him,' the Sawyer replied, without much discontent, 'that it were a risky thing to try the gulches, such a night as that? His own way he would have, however; and finer liars than he could ever stick up to be, for a score of years, have gone, time upon time, to the land of truth by means of that same view of things. They take everybody else for a liar.'

'Oh, Uncle Sam, who is it?' I cried. 'Is it that dreadful—that poor man, who wanted to carry me away from you?'

'Now you go in, missy; you go to the fire-hearth,' Mr. Gundry answered, more roughly than usual. 'Leave you all such points to the Lord. They are not for young ladies to talk about.'

'Grandfather, don't you be too hard,' said Firm, as he saw me hurrying away. 'Miss Rema has asked nothing unbecoming, but only concerning her own affairs. If we refuse to tell her, others will.'

'Very well, then, so be it,' the Sawyer replied; for he yielded more to his grandson than to the rest of the world put together. 'Turn the log up, Firm, and put the pan on. You boys can go on without victuals all day, but an old man must feed regular. And, bad as he was, I thank God for sending him on his way home with his belly full. If ever he turneth up in the snow, that much can be proved to my account.'

Young as I was, and little practised in the ways of settlers, I could not help perceiving that Uncle Sam was very much put out—not at the death of the man so sadly, as at the worry of his dying so in going from a hospitable house. Mr. Gundry cared little what anybody said concerning his honour, or courage, or such like but the thought of a whisper against his hospitality would rouse him.

'Find him, Firm, find him,' he said in his deep, sad voice, as he sat down on the antlered stump and gazed at the fire gloomily. 'And when he is found, call a public post-mortem, and prove that we gave him his bellyful.'

Ephraim, knowing the old man's ways, and the manners, perhaps, of the neighbourhood, beckoned to Suan to be quick with something hot, that he might hurry out again. Then he took his dinner standing, and without a word went forth to seek.

'Take the snow-harrow, and take Jowler,' the old man shouted after him, and the youth turned round at the gate and waved his cap to show that he heard him. The snow was again falling heavily, and the afternoon was waning; and the last thing we saw was the brush of the mighty tail of the great dog Jowler.

'Oh, uncle, Firm will be lost himself!' I cried in dismay at the great white waste. 'And the poor man, whoever he is, must be dead. Do call him back, or let me run.'

Mr. Gundry's only answer was to lead me

back to the fireside, where he made me sit down and examined me, while Suan was frying the butter-beans.

'Who was it spied you on the mountains, missy, the whole of the way from the big pine tree, although you lay senseless on the ground, and he was hard at work with the loppings?'

'Why, Ephraim, of course, Uncle Sam; everybody says that nobody else could have noticed such a thing at such a distance.'

'Very well, my dear; and who was it carried you all the way to this house, without stopping, or even letting your head droop down, although it was a burning hot summer morn?'

'Mr. Gundry, as if you did not know a great deal better than I do! It was weeks before I could thank him even. But you must have seen him do it all.'

The Sawyer rubbed his chin, which was large enough for a great deal of rubbing; and when he did that, I was always sure that an argument went to his liking. He said nothing more for the present, but had his dinner and enjoyed it.

'Supposing now that he did all that,' he resumed about an hour afterwards, 'is Firm the sort of boy you would look to, to lose his own self in a snow-drift? He has three men with him, and he is worth all three; let alone the big dog Jowler, who has dug out forty feet of snow ere now. If that rogue of an Englishman, Goad, has had the luck to cheat the hangman, and the honour to die in a Californy snow-drift, you may take my experience for it, missy, Firm and Jowler will find him, and clear Uncle Sam's reputation.'

CHAPTER IX.

A WATERSPOUT.

If Mr. Gundry was in one way right, he was equally wrong in the other. Firm came home quite safe and sound, though smothered with snow and most hungry; but he thought that he should have stayed out all the night, because he had failed of his errand. Jowler also was full of discontent and trouble of conscience. He knew, when he kicked up his heels in the snow, that his duty was to find somebody; and being of Alpine pedigree, and trained to act up to his ancestry, he now dropped his tail with failure.

'It comes to the same thing,' said Sawyer Gundry; 'it is foolish to be so particular. A thousand better men have sunk through being so pig-headed. We shall find the rogue towards the end of March, or in April, if the season suits. Firm, eat your supper and shake yourself.'

This was exactly the Sawyer's way—to take things quietly, when convinced that there was no chance to better them. He would always do his best about the smallest trifle; but after that, be the matter small or great, he had a smiling face for the end of it.

The winter, with all its weight of sameness and of dreariness, went at last; and the lovely spring, from the soft Pacific, found its gradual way to us. Accustomed as I was to gentler climates and more easy changes, I lost myself in admiration of this my first Californian spring. The flowers, the leagues and leagues of flowers, that burst into colour and harmony—purple, yellow, and delicate lilac, woven with bright crimson threads, and fringed with emerald green by the banks, and blue by the course of rivers, while deepened here and there by wooded shelter and cool places, with the silver grey of the soft Pacific waning in far distance, and silken vapour drawing towards the carding forks of the mountain range; and over all the never-wearying azure of the limpid sky—child as I was, and full of little worldly troubles on

my own account, these grand and noble sights enlarged me, without any thinking.

The wheat and the maize were grown apace, and beans come into full blossom, and the peaches swinging in the western breeze were almost as large as walnuts, and all things in their prime of freshness, ere the yellow dust arrived, when a sudden melting of snow in some gulley sent a strong flood down our Blue River. The sawmill happened to be hard at work; and before the gear could be lifted, some damage was done to the floats by the heavy impetuous rush of the torrent. Uncle Sam was away, and so was Firm; from which, perhaps, the mischief grew. However, the blame was all put on the river, and little more was said of it.

The following morning I went down before even Firm was out of doors, under some touch, perhaps, of natural desire to know things. The stream was as pure and bright as ever, hastening down its gravel-path of fine granite just as usual, except that it had more volume and a stronger sense of freshness. Only the bent of

the grasses, and the swathe of the pendulous twigs down stream, remained to show that there must have been some violence quite lately.

All Mr. Gundry's strengthening piles and shores were as firm as need be, and the clear blue water played around them as if they were no constraint to it. And none but a practised eye could see that the great wheel had been wounded, being undershot, and lifted now above the power of the current, according to the fine old plan of locking the door when the horse is gone.

When I was looking up, and wondering where to find the mischief, Martin, the foreman, came out and crossed the plank, with his mouth full of breakfast.

'Show me,' I said, with an air, perhaps, of very young importance, 'where and what the damage is? Is there any strain to the iron-work?'

'Lor' a mercy, young missus,' he answered gruffly, being by no means a polished man; 'where did you ever hear of iron-work?

Needles and pins is enough for you. Now don't you go and make no mischief.'

'I have no idea what you mean,' I answered. 'If you have been careless, that is no concern of mine.'

'Careless, indeed! And the way I works when others is a-snorin' in their beds! I might just as well do nort, every bit, and get more thanks and better wages. That's the way of the world, all over. Come Saturday week, I shall better myself.'

'But if it's the way of the world all over, how will you better yourself, unless you go out of the world altogether?' I put this question to Martin with the earnest simplicity of the young, meaning no kind of sarcasm, but knowing that scarcely a week went by without his threatening to 'better himself.' And they said that he had done so for seven years or more.

'Don't you be too sharp,' he replied, with a grim smile, partly at himself, perhaps. 'If half as I heard about you is true, you'll want all your sharpness for yourself, Miss Remy. And the Britishers are worse than we be.'

'Well, Martin, I am sure you would help me,' I said, 'if you saw any person injuring me. But what is it I am not to tell your master?'

'My master, indeed! Well, you need not tell old Gundry anything about what you have seen. It might lead to hard words; and hard words are not the style of thing I put up with. If any man tries hard words with me, I knocks him down, up sticks, and makes tracks.'

I could not help smiling at the poor man's talk. Sawyer Gundry could have taken him with one hand and tossed him over the under-shot wheel.

'You forget that I have not seen anything,' I said, 'and understand nothing but "needles and pins." But, for fear of doing any harm, I will not even say that I have been down here unless I am asked about it.'

'Miss Remy, you are a good girl, and you shall have the mill some day. Lord, don't your little great eyes see the job they're a-doin' of? The finest stroke in all Californy, when the stubborn old chap takes to quartz-crushing.'

All this was beyond me, and I told him so,

and we parted good friends, while he shook his long head and went home to feed many papooses. For the strangest thing of all things was, though I never at that time thought of it, that there was not anyone about this place whom anyone could help liking. Martin took as long as anybody to be liked, until one understood him; but after that he was one of the best in many ways that cannot be described. Also there was a pair of negroes, simply and sweetly delightful. They worked all day and they sang all night, though I had not the pleasure of hearing them; and the more Suan Isco despised them—because they were black, and she was only brown—the more they made up to her, not at all because she governed the supply of victuals. It was childish to have such ideas, though Suan herself could never get rid of them. The truth, as I came to know afterwards, was that a large, free-hearted, and determined man was at the head of everything. Martin was the only one who ever grumbled, and he had established a long right to do so by never himself being grumbled at.

'I'll be bound that poor fellow is in a sad way,' Mr. Gundry said at breakfast-time. 'He knows how much he is to blame, and I fear that he won't eat a bit for the day. Martin is a most conscientious man. He will offer to give up his berth, although it would be his simple ruin.'

I was wise enough not to say a word, though Firm looked at me keenly. He knew that I had been down at the mill, and expected me to say something.

'We all must have our little mistakes,' continued Sawyer Gundry; 'but I never like to push a man when he feels it. I shall not say a syllable to Martin; and, Ephraim, you will do the like. When a fellow sticks well to his work, like Martin, never blame him for a mere accident.'

Firm, according to his habit, made no answer when he did not quite agree. In talking with his own age he might have argued, but he did not argue with his grandfather.

'I shall just go down and put it right myself. Martin is a poor hand at repairing. Firm, you go up the gulch, and see if the fresh has hurt

the hurdles. Missy, you may come with me, if you please, and sketch me at work in the mill-wheel. You have drawn that wheel such a sight of times, you must know every feather of it, better than the man who made it.'

'Uncle Sam, you are too bad,' I said; 'I have never got it right, and I never shall.'

I did not dare as yet to think what really proved to be true in the end—that I could not draw the wheel correctly because itself was incorrect. In spite of all Mr. Gundry's skill, and labour, and ingenuity, the wheel was no true circle. The error began in the hub itself, and increased, of course, with the distance; but still it worked very well, like many other things that are not perfect.

Having no idea of this as yet, and doubting nothing except my own perception of 'perspective,' I sat down once more in my favourite spot, and waited for the master to appear as an active figure in the midst of it. The air was particularly bright and clear, even for that pure climate, and I could even see the blue-winged flies darting in and out of the oozy floats. But

halfway up the mountains a white cloud was hanging, a cloud that kept on changing shape. I only observed it as a thing to put in for my background, because I was fond of trying to tone and touch up my sketches with French chalks.

Presently I heard a harsh metallic sound, and creaking of machinery. The bites, or clamps, or whatever they are called, were being put on, to keep the wheel from revolving with the Sawyer's weight. Martin, the foreman, was grumbling and growling, according to his habit, and peering through the slot, or channel of stone in which the axle worked, and the cheery voice of Mr. Gundry was putting down his objections. Being much too large to pass through the slot, Mr. Gundry came round the corner of the building, with a heavy leathern bag of tools strapped round his neck, and his canvas breeches girt above his knees. But the foreman stayed inside, to hand him the needful material into the wheel.

The Sawyer waded merrily down the shallow blue water, for he was always like a boy when he

was at work, and he waved his little skull-cap to me, and swung himself up into the wheel, as if he were nearer seventeen than seventy. And presently I could only see his legs and arms, as he fell to work. Therefore I also fell to work, with my best attempts at pencilling, having been carefully taught enough of drawing to know that I could not draw. And perhaps I caught from the old man's presence, and the sound of his activity, that strong desire to do my best which he seemed to impart to everyone.

At any rate, I was so engrossed that I scarcely observed the changing light, except as a hindrance to my work and a trouble to my distance, till suddenly some great drops fell upon my paper and upon my hat, and a rush of dark wind almost swept me from the log upon which I sat. Then again all was a perfect calm, and the young leaves over the stream hung heavily on their tender foot-stalks, and the points of the breeze-swept grass turned back, and the ruffle of all things smoothed itself. But there seemed to be a sense of fear in the waiting silence of earth and air.

This deep, unnatural stillness scared me, and I made up my mind to run away. But the hammer of the Sawyer sounded as I had never heard it sound. He was much too hard at work to pay any heed to sky or stream, and the fall of his strokes was dead and hollow, as if the place resented them.

'Come away, come away,' I cried, as I ran and stood on the opposite bank to him; 'there is something quite wrong in the weather, I am quite sure. I entreat you to come away at once, Uncle Sam. Everything is so strange and odd.'

'Why, what's to do now?' asked the Sawyer, coming to my side of the wheel and looking at me, with his spectacles tilted up, and his apron wedged in a piece of timber, and his solid figure resting in the impossibility of hurry. 'Missy, don't you make a noise out there? You can't have your own way always.'

'Oh, Uncle Sam, don't talk like that. I am in such a fright about you. Do come out and look at the mountains.'

'I have seen the mountains often enough,

and I am up to every trick of them. There may be a corn or two of rain ; no more. My sea-weed was like tinder. There can't be no heavy storm when it is like that. Don't you make pretence, missy, to know what is beyond you.'

Uncle Sam was so seldom cross that I always felt that he had a right to be so. And he gave me one of his noble smiles to make up for the sharpness of his words, and then back he went to his work again. So I hoped that I was altogether wrong, till a bolt of lightning, like a blue dagger, fell at my very feet, and a crash of thunder shook the earth and stunned me. These opened the sluice of the heavens, and before I could call out I was drenched with rain. Clinging to a bush, I saw the valley lashed with cloudy blasts, and a whirling mass of spiral darkness rushing like a giant towards me. And the hissing, and tossing, and roaring mixed whatever was in sight together.

Such terror fell upon me at first that I could not look, and could scarcely think, but cowered beneath the blaze of lightning, as a singed moth

drops and shivers. And a storm of wind struck me from my hold, so that I fell upon the wet earth. Every moment I expected to be killed, for I never could be brave in a thunderstorm, and had not been told much in France of God's protection around me. And the darts of lightning hissed and crossed like a blue and red web over me. So I laid hold of a little bent of weed, and twisted it round my dabbled wrist, and tried to pray to the Virgin, although I had often been told it was vanity.

Then suddenly wiping my eyes, I beheld a thing which entirely changed me. A vast, broad wall of brown water, nearly as high as the mill itself, rushed down with a crest of foam from the mountains. It seemed to fill up all the valley, and to swallow up all the trees ; a whole host of animals fled before it, and birds, like a volley of bullets, flew by. I lost not a moment in running away, and climbing a rock and hiding. It was base, ungrateful, and a nasty thing to do ; but I did it almost without thinking. And if I had stayed to cry out, what good could I have done—only to be swept away ?

Now, as far as I can remember anything out of so much horror, I must have peeped over the summit of my rock when the head of the deluge struck the mill. But whether I saw it, or whether I knew it by any more summary process, such as outruns the eyes sometimes, is more than I dare presume to say. Whichever way I learned it, it was thus :—

A solid mass of water, much bigger than the mill itself, burst on it, dashed it to atoms, leaped off with it, and span away the great wheel anyhow, like the hoop of a child sent trundling. I heard no scream or shriek ; and, indeed, the bellow of a lion would have been a mere whisper in the wild roar of the elements. Only where the mill had been there was nothing except a black streak and a boil in the deluge. Then scores of torn-up trees swept over, as a bush-harrow jumps on the clods of the field, and the merciless flood, having wreaked its wrath, shone quietly in the lightning.

'Oh, Uncle Sam, Uncle Sam !' I cried. But there was not a sign to be seen of him ; and I

thought of his gentle, good, obstinate ways, and my heart was almost broken. 'What a brute, what a wretch I am!' I kept saying, as if I could have helped it; and my fear of the lightning was gone, and I stood and raved with scorn and amazement.

In this misery and confusion it was impossible to think, and instinct alone could have driven my despair to a desperate venture. With my soaked clothes sticking between my legs, I ran as hard as they would go, by a short cut over a field of corn, to a spot where the very last bluff, or headland, jutted into the river. This was a good mile below the mill, according to the bends of the channel, but only a furlong or so from the rock upon which I had taken refuge. However, the flood was there before me, and the wall of water dashed on to the plains, with a brindled comb behind it.

Behind it also came all the ruin of the mill that had any floatage, and bodies of bears, and great hogs, and cattle, some of them alive, but the most part dead. A grand black bull

tossed back his horns, and looked at me beseechingly; he had frightened me often in quiet days, but now I was truly grieved for him. And then on a wattle of brushwood I saw the form of a man—the Sawyer.

His white hair draggled in the wild brown flood, and the hollow of his arms was heaped with froth, and his knotted legs hung helpless. Senseless he lay on his back, and sometimes the wash of the waves went over him. His face was livid, but his brave eyes open, and a heavy weight hung round his neck. I had no time to think, and deserve no praise, for I knew not what I did. But just as an eddy swept him near me, I made a desperate leap at him, and clutched at something that tore my hands, and then I went under the water. My senses, however, were not yet gone, and my weight on the wattle stopped it, and I came up gurgling, and flung one arm round a fat, woolly sheep going by me. The sheep was waterlogged, and could scarcely keep his own poor head from drowning, and he turned his mild eyes and looked at me; but I could not spare him. He struck

for the shore in forlorn hope, and he towed us in some little.

It is no good for me to pretend to say how things were managed for us, for of course I could do nothing. But the sheep must have piloted us to a tree, whose branches swept the torrent. Here I let him go, and caught fast hold; and Uncle Sam's raft must have stuck there also, for what could my weak arm have done? I remember only to have felt the ground at last as the flood was exhausted; and good people came and found him and me, stretched side by side upon rubbish and mud.

CHAPTER X.

A NUGGET.

In a sacred corner (as soon as ever we could attend to anything) we hung up the leathern bag of tools, which had done much more towards saving the life of Uncle Sam than I did; for this had served as a kind of kedge, or drag, upon his little raft, retarding it from the great roll of billows, in which he must have been drowned outright. And even as it was, he took some days before he was like himself again.

Firm, who had been at the head of the valley, repairing some broken hurdles, declared that a waterspout had burst in the bosom of the mountain gorge where the Blue River has its origin, and the whole of its power got ponded back by a dam, which the Sawyer himself had made, at about five furlongs above the mill. Ephraim, being further up the gulch, and high

above the roaring flood, did his utmost with the keen edge of his eyes to pierce into the mischief; but it rained so hard, and at the same time blew so violently around him, that he could see nothing of what went on, but hoped for the best, with uneasiness.

Now when the Sawyer came round so well as to have a clear mind of things, and learn that his mill was gone, and his business lost, and himself, at this ripe time of life, almost driven to begin the world again, it was natural to expect that he would indulge in a good deal of grumbling. Many people came to comfort him, and to offer him deep condolence, and the truest of true sympathy, and everything that could be thought of, unless it were a loan of money. Of that they never thought, because it was such a trifling matter; and they all had confidence in his power to do anything but pay them. They told him that he was a young man still, and Providence watched over him; in a year or two he would be all the better for this sad visitation. And he said yes to their excellent advice, and was very much obliged to them.

At the same time it was clear to me, who watched him like a daughter, that he became heavy in his mind and sighed, as these kind friends, one after the other, enjoyed what he still could do for them, but rode away out of his gate with too much delicacy to draw purse-strings. Not that he would have accepted a loan from the heartiest heart of all of them, only that he would have liked the offer, to understand their meaning. And several of them were men—as Firm, in his young indignation, told me—who had been altogether set up in life by the kindness of Sampson Gundry.

Perhaps the Sawyer, after all his years, had no right to be vexed by this. But whether he was right or wrong, I am sure that it preyed upon his mind, though he was too proud to speak of it. He knew that he was not ruined, although these friends in their hearts believed him so; and some of them were quite angry with him because they had vainly warned him. He could not remember these warnings; yet he contradicted none of them; and fully believing in the goodness of the world, he became

convinced that he must have been hard in the days of his prosperity.

No sooner was he able to get about again than he went to San Francisco to raise money on his house and property for the rebuilding of the mill. Firm rode with him to escort him back, and so did Martin the foreman; for although the times were not so bad as they used to be some ten years back, in the height of the gold fever, it still was a highly undesirable thing for a man who was known to have money about him to ride forth alone from San Francisco, or even Sacramento town. And having mentioned the foreman Martin, in justice to him I ought to say that, although his entire loss from the disaster amounted only to a worn-out waistcoat of the value of about twenty cents, his vehemence in grumbling could only be equalled by his perseverance. By his great activity in running away and leaving his employer to meet the brunt, he had saved not only himself but his wife and children and goods and chattels. This failed, however, to remove or even assuage his regret for the waistcoat; and he moaned and

threatened to such good purpose that a speedy subscription was raised, which must have found him in clothes for the rest of his life, as well as a silver teapot with an inscription about his bravery.

When the three were gone, after strict injunctions from Mr. Gundry, and his grandson too, that I was on no account to venture beyond calling distance from the house, for fear of being run away with, I found the place so sad and lonesome that I scarcely knew what to do. I had no fear of robbers, though there were plenty in the neighbourhood. For we still had three or four men about, who could be thoroughly trusted, and who stayed with us on half-wages rather than abandon the Sawyer in his trouble. Suan Isco also was as brave as any man, and could shoot well with a rifle. Moreover, the great dog 'Jowler' was known and dreaded by all his enemies. He could pull down an Indian, or two half-castes, or three Mexicans, in about a second; and now he always went about with me, having formed a sacred friendship.

Uncle Sam had kissed me very warmly when

he said 'goodbye;' and Firm had shown some disposition to follow his example. But much as I liked and admired Firm, I had my own ideas as to what was unbecoming. And now in my lonely little walks I began to think about it. My father's resting-place had not been invaded by the imperious flood, although a line of drift-age, in a zigzag swathe, lay near the mound. This was my favourite spot for thinking when I felt perplexed and downcast in my young unaided mind. For although I have not spoken of my musings very copiously, any one would do me wrong who fancied that I was indifferent. Through the great kindness of Mr. Gundry and other good friends around me, I had no bitter sense as yet of my own dependence and poverty. But the vile thing I had heard about my father, the horrible slander and wicked falsehood—for such I was certain it must be—this was continually in my thoughts, and quite destroyed my cheerfulness. And the worst of it was, that I never could get my host to enter into it. Whenever I began, his face would change and his manner grow constrained, and his

chief desire always seemed to lead me to some other subject.

One day, when the heat of the summer came forth, and the peaches began to blush towards it, and the bronze-ribbed figs grew damask-grey with a globule of syrup in their eyes, and melons and pumpkins already had curved their fluted stalks with heaviness, and the dust of the plains was beginning to fly, and the bright spring flowers were dead more swiftly even than they first were born, I sat with Suan Isco at my father's cross, and told her to make me cry with some of all the many sad things she knew. She knew a wondrous number of things insatiably sad and wild; and the quiet way in which she told them (not only without any horror, but as if they were rightly to be expected), also the deep and rather guttural tone of voice, and the stillness of the form, made it impossible to help believing verily every word she said.

That there should be in the world such things, so dark, unjust, and full of woe, was enough to puzzle a child brought up among the

noblest philosophers ; whereas I had simply been educated by good unpretentious women, who had partly retired from the world, but not to such a depth as to drown all thought of what was left behind them. These were ready at any time to return upon good opportunity ; and some of them had done so, with many tears, upon coming into property.

'Please tell me no more now,' I said at last to Suan ; 'my eyes are so sore they will be quite red, and perhaps Uncle Sam will come home to-night. I am afraid he has found some trouble with the money, or he ought to have been at home before. Don't you think so, Suan ?'

'Yes, yes ; trouble with the money. Always with the white mans that.'

'Very well. I shall go and look for some money. I had a most wonderful dream last night. Only I must go quite alone. You had better go and look to the larder, Suan. If they come they are sure to be hungry.'

'Yes, yes ; the white mans always hungry, sep' they thirsty.'

The Indian woman, who had in her heart a

general contempt for all pale faces save those of our own household, drew her bright-coloured shawl around her, and set off with her peculiar walk. Her walk was not ungraceful, because it was so purely natural; but it differed, almost as much as the step of a quadruped, from what we are taught. With heavy thoughts, but careless steps, I set off on my wanderings. I wanted to try to have no set purpose, course, or consideration, but to go wherever chance should lead me, without choice, as in my dream. And after many vague turns, and even closings of rebellious eyes, I found myself, perhaps by force of habit, at the ruins of the mill.

I seemed to recognise some resemblance (which is as much as one can expect) to the scene which had been in my sleep before me. But sleeping I had seen roaring torrents; waking, I beheld a quiet stream. The little river, as blue as ever, and shrinking from all thoughts of wrath, showed nothing in its pure gaze now but a gladness to refresh and cool. In many nicely-sheltered corners it was full of soft reflection as to the good it had to do; and then in silver

and golden runnels on it went to do it. And happy prattle, and many sweetly flashing little glances, told that it knew of the soft life beside it, created and comforted by itself.

But I looked at the dark ruin it had wrought, and like a child I was angry with it for the sake of Uncle Sam. Only the foundations and the big heavy stones of the mill were left, and the clear bright water purled around, or made little eddies among them. All were touched with silvery sound, and soft caressing dimples. But I looked at the passionate mountains first, to be sure of no more violence; for if a burnt child dreads the fire, one half-drowned may be excused for little faith in water. The mountains in the sunshine looked as if nothing could move their grandeur, and so I stepped from stone to stone in the bed of placid brightness.

Presently I came to a place where one of the great black piles, driven in, by order of the Sawyer, to serve as a backstay for his walls, had been swept by the flood from its vertical sinking, but had not been swept away. The square tarred post of mountain pine reclined

down stream and gently nodded to the current's impact. But overthrown as it was, it could not make its exit and float away, as all its brethren had done. At this I had wondered before; and now I went to see what the reason was. By throwing a short piece of plank from one of the shattered foundations into a nick in the shoulder of the reclining pile, I managed to get there, and sit upon it, and search for its obstruction.

The water was flowing smoothly towards me, and as clear as crystal, being scarcely more than a foot in depth. And there, on the upper verge of the hole, raised by the leverage of the butt from the granite sand of the river-bed, I saw a broad outbreak of rich yellow light. This amazed me so that I cried out at once, 'Oh, what a beautiful great yellow fish!' And I shouted to 'Jowler,' who had found where I was, and followed me, as usual. The great dog was famous for his love of fishing, and had often brought a fine salmon forth.

Jowler was always a zealous fellow, and he answered eagerly to my call by dashing at once into the water, and following the guidance of

my hand. But when he saw what I pointed at he was bitterly disappointed, and gave me to understand as much by looking at me foolishly.

'Now don't be a stupid dog,' I said; 'do what I tell you immediately. Whatever it is, bring it out, sir.'

Jowler knew that I would be obeyed whenever I called him 'sir;' so he ducked his great head under the water, and tugged with his teeth at the object. His back corded up, and his tail grew rigid with the intensity of his labour, but the task was quite beyond him. He could not even stir the mighty mass at which he struggled, but he bit off a little projecting corner, and came to me with it in his mouth. Then he laid his dripping jaws on my lap, and his ears fell back, and his tail hung down with utter sense of failure.

I patted his broad, intelligent forehead, and wiped his brown eyes with his ears, and took from his lips what he offered to me. Then I saw that his grinders were framed with gold, as if he had been to a dentist regardless of expense, and into my hand he dropped a lump

of solid glittering virgin ore. He had not the smallest idea of having done anything worthy of human applause; and he put out his long red tongue, and licked his teeth, to get rid of uneatable dross, and gave me a quiet nudge, to ask what more I wanted of him.

CHAPTER XI

ROVERS.

From Jowler I wanted nothing more. Such matters were too grand for him. He had beaten the dog of Hercules, who had only brought the purple dye, a thing requiring skill, and art, and taste, to give it value. But gold does well without all these, and better in their absence. From handling many little nuggets, and hearkening Suan Isco's tales of treachery, theft, and murder done by white men for the sake of this, I knew that here I had found enough to cost the lives of fifty men.

At present, however, I was not possessed with dread so much as I was with joy, and even secret exultation, at the power placed suddenly in my hands. For I was too young to moralise or attempt philosophy. Here I had a knowledge which the wisest of mankind might

envy; much as they despise it, when they have no chance of getting it. I looked at my father's grave, in the shadow of the quiet peach-trees, and I could not help crying as I thought that this was come too late for him. Then I called off Jowler, who wished (like a man) to have another tug at it, and home I ran to tell my news; but failing of breath, had time to think.

It was lucky enough that this was so. For there might have been the greatest mischief; and sadly excited as I was, the trouble I had seen so much of came back to my beating heart, and told me to be careful. But surely there could be no harm in trusting Suan Isco. However, I looked at her several times, and was not quite so sure about it. She was wonderfully true and faithful, and never seemed to concede to gold its paramount rank and influence. But that might only have been because she had never known the want of it, or had never seen a lump worth stealing, which I was sure that this must be; and the unregenerate state of all who have never been baptized had been impressed on me continually. How could I mis-

trust a Christian, and place confidence in an Indian? Therefore I tried to sleep without telling any one, yet was unable.

But, as it happened, my good discovery did not keep me so very long awake. For on the following day our troop of horsemen returned from San Francisco. Of course I have done very foolish things, once and again throughout my life; but perhaps I never did anything more absurd than during the morning of that day. To begin with, I was up before the sun, and down at the mill, and along the plank, which I had removed overnight, but now replaced as my bridge to the pinewood pile. Then I gazed with eager desire and fear—which was the stronger, I scarcely know—for the yellow undergleam, to show the safety of my treasure. There it lay, as safe as could be, massive, grand, and beautiful, with tones of varying richness, as the ripples varied over it. The pale light of the morning breathed a dewy lustre down the banks; the sun (although unrisen here) drew furrows through the mountain gaps; the birds from every hanging tree ad-

dressed the day with melody; the crystal water, purer than devotion's brightest dream, went by; and here among them lay unmoved, unthought-of, and inanimate, the thing which to a human being is worth all the rest put together.

This contemplation had upon me an effect so noble that here I resolved to spend my time, for fear of any robbery. I was afraid to gaze more than could be helped at this grand sight; lest other eyes should spy what was going on, and long to share it. And after hurrying home to breakfast and returning in like haste, I got a scare, such as I well deserved, for being so flurried and foolish.

The carpentry of the mill-wheel had proved so very staunch and steadfast, that even in that raging deluge the whole had held together. It had been bodily torn from its hold, and swept away down the valley; but somewhere it grounded, as the flood ebbed out; and a strong team had tugged it back again. And the Sawyer had vowed that, come what would, his mill should work with the self-same wheel which he with younger hands had wrought.

Now this wheel (to prevent any warp, and save the dry timber from the sun) was laid in a little shady cut, where water trickled under it. And here I had taken up my abode, to watch my monster nugget.

I had pulled my shoes and stockings off, and was paddling in the runnel, sheltered by the deep rim of the wheel and enjoying the water. Little fish darted by me, and lovely spotted lizards played about, and I was almost beginning even to forget my rock of gold. In self-defence, it is right to say, that for the gold, on my own account, I cared as much as I might have done for a fig worm-eaten. It was for Uncle Sam, and all his dear love, that I watched the gold, hoping in his sad disaster to restore his fortunes. But suddenly over the rim of the wheel (laid flat in the tributary brook) I descried across the main river a moving company of horsemen.

These men could have nothing to do with Uncle Sam and his party ; for they were coming from the mountain-side, while he would return by the track across the plains. And they were

already so near that I could see their dress quite plainly, and knew them to be Mexican rovers, mixed with loose Americans. There are few worse men on the face of the earth than these, when in the humour, and unluckily they seem almost always to be in that humour. Therefore, when I saw their battered sun-hats and baggy, slouching boots, I feared that little ruth, or truth, or mercy dwelled between them.

On this account I shrank behind the shelter of the mill-wheel, and held my head in one trembling hand, and with the other drew my wind-tossed hair to a smaller compass. For my blood ran cold at the many dreadful things that came into my mind. I was sure that they had not spied me yet; and my overwhelming desire was to decline all introduction.

I counted fourteen gentlemen, for so they always styled themselves, and would pistol any man who expressed a contrary opinion—fourteen of them rode to the brink of the quiet blue river, on the other side; and there they let their horses drink, and some dismounted and

filled canteens, and some of longer reach stooped from the saddle and did likewise. But one, who seemed to be the captain, wanted no water for his rum.

'Cut it short, boys,' I heard him say, with a fine South Californian twang (which, as well as his free swearing, I will freely omit). 'If we mean to have fair play with the gal, now or never's the time for it—old Sam may come home almost any time.'

What miserable cowards! Though there were so many of them, they really had no heart to face an old man known for courage. Frightened as I was, perhaps good indignation helped me to flutter no more, and not faint away, but watch those miscreants steadily.

The horses put down their sandy lips over and over again to drink, scarcely knowing when they ought to stop, and seemed to get thicker before my eyes. The dribbling of the water from their mouths prepared them to begin again, till the riders struck the savage, unrowelled spur into them. At this, they jerked their noses up, and looked at one

another, to say that they expected it, and then they lifted their weary legs and began to plash through the river.

It is a pretty thing to see a skilful horse plod through a stream, probing with his eyes the depth, and stretching his head before his feet, and at every step he whisks his tail, to tell himself that he is right. In my agony of observation, all these things I heeded, but only knew that I had done so when I thought long afterwards. At the moment I was in such a fright that my eyes worked better than my mind. However, even so, I thought of my golden millstone, and was aware that they crossed below, where they could not see it.

They gained the bank upon our side, within fifty yards of where I crouched; and it was not presence of mind, but abject fear, which kept me crouching. I counted them again as they leaped the bank, and seemed to look at me. I could see the dark array of eyes, and could scarcely keep from shrieking. But my throat was dry, and made no sound, and a frightened bird set up a scream, which drew off their attention.

In perils of later days I often thought of this fear, and almost felt that the hand of Heaven had been stretched forth on purpose to help my helplessness.

For the moment, however, I lay as close as if under the hand of the evil one; and the snorting of the horses passed me, and the wicked laughter of the men. One was telling a horrible tale, and the rest rejoicing in it; and the bright sun, glowing on their withered skin, discovered, perhaps, no viler thing in all the world to shine upon. One of them even pointed at my mill-wheel with a witty gibe—at least perhaps it was wit to him—about the Sawyer's misfortune, but the sun was then in his eyes, and my dress was just the colour of the timber. So on they rode, and the pleasant turf (having lately received some rain) softly answered the kneading of their hoofs, as they galloped away, to surround the house.

I was just at the very point of rising, and running up into the dark of the valley, when a stroke of arithmetic stopped me. Fourteen men and fourteen horses, I had counted on

the other side; on this side I could not make any more than thirteen of them. I might have made a mistake; but still I thought I would stop just a minute to see. And in that minute I saw the other man walking slowly on the opposite bank. He had tethered his horse, and was left as outpost, to watch and give warning of poor Uncle Sam's return

At the thought of this, my frightened courage, in some extraordinary way, came back. I had played an ignoble part thus far, as almost any girl might have done. But now I resolved that, whatever might happen, my dear friend and guardian should not be entrapped, and lose his life through my cowardice. We had been expecting him all the day; and if he should come and fall into an ambush, I only might survive to tell the tale. I ought to have hurried and warned the house, as my bitter conscience told me; but now it was much too late for that. The only amends that I could make was to try and warn our travellers.

Stooping as low as I could, and watching my time to cross the more open places, when

the sentry was looking away from me, I passed up the winding of the little watercourse, and sheltered in the swampy thicket which concealed its origin. Hence I could see for miles over the plain, broad reaches of corn-land already turning pale, mazy river fringed with reed, hamlets scattered among clustering trees, and that which I chiefly cared to see, the dusty track from Sacramento.

Whether from ignorance of the country or of Mr. Gundry's plan, the sentinel had been posted badly. His beat commanded well enough the course from San Francisco; but that from Sacramento was not equally clear before him. For a jut of pine forest ran down from the mountains, and cut off a part of his view of it. I had not the sense or the presence of mind to perceive this great advantage, but having a plain quick path before me, forth I set upon it. Of course, if the watchman had seen me, he would have leaped on his horse and soon caught me, but of that I scarcely even thought; I was in such confusion.

When I had run perhaps a mile (being at that time very slight, and of active figure), I

saw a cloud of dust about two miles off, rising through the bright blue haze. It was rich yellow dust of the fertile soil, which never seems to cake or clot. Sometimes you may walk for miles without the smallest fear of sinking; the earth is so elastic. And yet, with a slight exertion you may push a walking-stick down through it, until the handle stops it. My heart gave a jump; that cloud of dust was a sign of men on horseback. And who could it be but Uncle Sam, and Firm, and the foreman Martin?

As soon as it began to declare itself it proved to be these very three, carelessly lounging on their horses' backs, overcome with heat, and lust, and thirst. But when they saw me there all alone under the fury of the sun, they knew that something must have gone amiss, and were all wideawake in a moment.

'Well now,' said the Sawyer, when I had told my tale, as well as short breath allowed; 'put this thing over your head, my dear, or you may gain a sunstroke. I call it too bad of them skunks to drive you in Californy noon like this.'

'Oh, Uncle Sam, never think of me; think of your house and your goods, and Suan, and all at those bad men's mercy!'

'The old house ain't afire yet,' he answered, looking calmly under his hand in that direction. 'And as for Suan, no fear at all. She knows how to deal with such gallowses; and they will keep her to cook their dinner. Firm, my lad, let us go and embrace them. They wouldn't a' made much bones of shooting us down, if we hadn't known of it, and if they had got miss afore the saddle. But if they don't skip bail as soon as they see me ride up to my door, my name's not Sampson Gundry. Only you keep out of the way, Miss Remy. You go to sleep a bit, that's a dear, in the graywitch spinny yonder, and wait till you hear Firm sound the horn. And then come you in to dinner-time; for the Lord is always over you.'

I hastened to the place which he pointed out—a beautiful covert of birch-trees—but to sleep was out of the question; worn out though I was with haste and heat, and (worst of all) with horror. In a soft mossy nest, where a

breeze from the mountains played with the in-and-out ways of the wood, and the murmurous dream of genial insects now was beginning to drowse upon the air, and the heat of the sun could almost be seen, thrilling through the alleys, like a cicale's drum—here, in the middle of the languid peace, I waited for the terror of the rifle-crack.

For though Uncle Sam had spoken softly, and made so little of the peril he would meet, I had seen in his eyes some token of the deep wrath and strong indignation which had kept all his household and premises safe. And it seemed a most ominous sign that Firm had never said a word, but grasped his gun, and slyly got in front of his grandfather.

CHAPTER XII.

GOLD AND GRIEF.

It may have been an hour, but it seemed an age, ere the sound of the horn, in Firm's strong blast, released me from my hiding-place. I had heard no report of fire-arms nor perceived any sign of conflict; and certainly the house was not on fire, or else I must have seen the smoke. For being still in great alarm, I had kept a very sharp look-out.

Ephraim Gundry came to meet me, which was very kind of him. He carried his bugle in his belt, that he might sound again for me, if needful. But I was already running towards the house, having made up my mind to be resolute. Nevertheless, I was highly pleased to have his company, and hear what had been done.

'Please to let me help you,' he said with a

smile; 'why, miss, you are trembling dreadfully. I assure you there is no cause for that.'

'But you might have been killed, and Uncle Sam, and Martin, and everybody. Oh, those men did look so horrible!'

'Yes, they always do, till you come to know them. But bigger cowards were never born. If they can take people by surprise, and shoot them without any danger, it is a splendid treat to them. But if anyone like grandfather meets them, face to face, in the daylight, their respect for law and life returns. It is not the first visit they have paid us. Grandfather kept his temper well. It was lucky for them that he did.'

Remembering that the rovers must have numbered nearly three to one, even if all our men were staunch, I thought it lucky for ourselves that there had been no outbreak. But Firm seemed rather sorry that they had departed so easily. And knowing that he never bragged, I began to share his confidence.

'They must be shot, sooner or later,' he said; 'unless indeed they should be hanged. Their manner of going on is out of date in

these days of settlement. It was all very well ten years ago. But now we are a civilised state, and the hand of law is over us. I think we were wrong to let them go. But of course I yield to the governor. And I think he was afraid for your sake. And to tell the truth, I may have been the same.'

Here he gave my arm a little squeeze, which appeared to me quite out of place; therefore I withdrew, and hurried on. Before he could catch me I entered the door, and found the Sawyer sitting calmly with his own long pipe once more, and watching Suan cooking.

'They rogues have had all the best of our victuals,' he said, as soon as he had kissed me. 'Respectable visitors is my delight, and welcome to all of the larder. But at my time of life it goes agin' the grain to lease out my dinner to galley-rakers. Suan, you are burning the fat again.'

Suan Isco, being an excellent cook (although of quiet temper), never paid heed to criticism, but lifted her elbow and went on. Mr. Gundry knew that it was wise to offer no further meddling; although it is well to keep them up to

their work by a little grumbling. But when I came to see what broken bits were left for Suan to deal with, I only wondered that he was not cross.

'Thank God for a better meal than I deserve,' he said, when they all had finished; 'Suan you are a treasure, as I tell you every day a'most. Now, if they have left us a bottle of wine, let us have it up. We be all in the dumps. But that will never do, my lad.'

He patted Firm on the shoulder, as if he were the younger man of the two; and his grandson went down to the wreck of the cellar; while I, who had tried to wait upon them, in an eager, clumsy way, perceived that something was gone amiss, something more serious and lasting than the mischief made by the robber troop. Was it that his long ride had failed, and not a friend could be found to help him?

When Martin and the rest were gone, after a single glass of wine, and Ephraim had made excuse of something to be seen to, the Sawyer leaned back in his chair, and his cheerful face was troubled. I filled his pipe, and lit it for him, and waited for him to speak, well knowing

his simple and outspoken heart. But he looked at me, and thanked me kindly, and seemed to be turning some grief in his mind.

'It ain't for the money,' he said at last, talking more to himself than to me; 'the money might a' been all very well, and useful in a sort of way. But the feelin', the feelin' is the thing I look at; and it ought to have been more hearty. Security! Charge on my land indeed! And I can run away, but my land must stop behind! What security did I ask of them? 'Tis enough a'most to make a rogue of me.'

'Nothing could ever do that, Uncle Sam!' I exclaimed, as I came and sat close to him; while he looked at me bravely, and began to smile.

'Why, what was little missy thinking of?' he asked. 'How solid she looks! Why, I never see the like!'

'Then you ought to have seen it, Uncle Sam. You ought to have seen it fifty times, with everybody who loves you. And who can help loving you, Uncle Sam?'

'Well, they say that I charged too much for lumber, a-cuttin' on the cross, and the back-

stroke work. And it may a' been so, when I took agin' a man. But to bring up all that, with the mill strown down, is a cowardly thing, to my thinking. And to make no count of the beadin' I threw in, whenever it were a straight-forrard job, and the turpsy knots, and the clogging of the teeth—'tis a bad bit to swallow, when the mill is strown.'

'But the mill shall not be strown, Uncle Sam. The mill shall be built again. And I will find the money.'

Mr. Gundry stared at me, and shook his head. He could not bear to tell me how poor I was, while I thought myself almost made of money. 'Five thousand dollars you have got put by for me,' I continued, with great importance. 'Five thousand dollars from the sale and the insurance fund. And five thousand dollars must be five-and-twenty-thousand francs. Uncle Sam, you shall have every farthing of it. And if that won't build the mill again, I have got my mother's diamonds.'

'Five thousand dollars!' cried the Sawyer,

in amazement, opening his deep grey eyes at me. And then he remembered the tale which he had told, to make me seem independent. 'Oh yes, to be sure, my dear; now I recollect. To be sure—to be sure—your own five thousand dollars! But never will I touch one cent of your nice little fortune; no, not to save my life. After all, I am not so gone in years but what I can build the mill again myself. The Lord hath spared my hands and eyes, and gifted me still with machinery. And Firm is a very handy lad, and can carry out a job pretty fairly, with better brains to stand over him; although it has not pleased the Lord to gift him with sense of machinery, like me. But that is all for the best, no doubt. If Ephraim had too much of brains, he might have contradicted me. And that I could never abide, God knows, from any green young jackanapes.'

'Oh, Uncle Sam, let me tell you something, something very important!'

'No, my dear, nothing more just now. It has done me good to have a little talk, and scared the blue somethings out of me. But

just go and ask whatever is become of Firm. He was riled with them greasers. It was all I could do to keep the boy out of a difficulty with them. And if they camp anywhere nigh, it is like enough he may go hankerin' after them. The grand march of intellect hathn't managed yet to march old heads upon young shoulders. And Firm might happen to go outside the law.'

The thought of this frightened me not a little; for Firm, though mild of speech, was very hot of spirit at any wrong; as I knew from tales of Suan Isco, who had brought him up, and made a glorious idol of him. And now, when she could not say where he was, but only was sure that he must be quite safe (in virtue of a charm from a great medicine-man which she had hung about him), it seemed to me, according to what I was used to, that in these regions human life was held a great deal too lightly.

It was not for one moment that I cared about Firm, any more than is the duty of a fellow-creature: he was a very good young man, and in his way good-looking, educated

also quite enough, and polite, and a very good carver of a joint; and when I spoke, he nearly always listened. But, of course, he was not to be compared as yet to his grandfather, the true Sawyer.

When I ran back from Suan Isco, who was going on about her charm, and the impossibility of anyone being scalped who wore it, I found Mr. Gundry in a genial mood. He never made himself uneasy about any trifles. He always had a very pure and lofty faith in the ways of Providence, and having lost his only son Elijah, he was sure that he never could lose Firm. He had taken his glass of hot whiskey-and-water, which always made him temperate; and if he felt any of his troubles deeply, he dwelt on them now from a high point of view.

'I may a' said a little too much, my dear, about the badness of mankind,' he observed, with his pipe lying comfortably on his breast; 'all sayings of that sort is apt to go too far. I ought to have made more allowance for the times, which gets into a ticklish state, when a old man is put about with them. Never you

pay no heed whatever to any harsh words I may have used. All that is a very bad thing for young folk.'

'But if they treated you badly, Uncle Sam, how can you think that they treated you well?'

He took some time to consider this, because he was true in all his thoughts. And then he turned off to something else.

'Why the smashing of the mill may have been a mercy, although in disguise to the present time of sight. It will send up the price of scantlings, and we was getting on too fast with them. By the time we have built up the mill again we shall have more orders than we know how to do with. When I come to reckon of it, to me it appears to be the reasonable thing to feel a lump of grief for the old mill, and then to set to and build a stronger one. Yes, that must be about the right thing to do. And we'll have all the neighbours in when we lay foundations.

'But what will be the good of it, Uncle Sam, when the new mill may at any time be washed away again?'

'Never, at any time,' he answered very firmly, gazing through the door, as if he saw the vain endeavour. 'That little game can easily be stopped, for about fifty dollars, by opening down the bank towards the old track of the river. The biggest waterspout that ever came down from the mountains could never come anigh the mill, but go right down the valley. It hath been in my mind to do it often, and now that I see the need, I will. Firm and I will begin to-morrow.'

'But where's all the money to come from, Uncle Sam? You said that all your friends had refused to help you.'

'Never mind, my dear. I will help myself. It won't be the first time, perhaps, in my life.'

'But supposing that I could help you, just some little. Supposing that I had found the biggest lump of gold ever found in all California?'

Mr. Gundry ought to have looked surprised; and I was amazed that he did not. But he took it as quietly as if I had told him that I had just picked up a brass button of his

And I thought that he doubted my knowledge, very likely, even as to what gold was.

'It is gold, Uncle Sam, every bit of it gold—here is a piece of it—just look—and as large, I am sure, as this table. And it may be as deep as this room, for all that one can judge to the contrary. Why, it stopped the big pile from coming to the top, when even you went down the river.'

'Well, now, that explains a thing or two,' said the Sawyer, smiling peacefully, and beginning to think of another pipe, if preparation meant anything. 'Two things have puzzled me about that stump, and indeed I might say three things. Why did he take such a time to drive, and why would he never stand up like a man, and why wouldn't he go away when he ought to?'

'Because he had the best of all reasons, Uncle Sam. He was anchored on his gold, as I have read in French, and he had a good right to be crooked about it, and no power could get him away from it.'

'Hush, my dear, hush! It is not at all

good for young people to let their minds run on so. But this gold looks very good indeed. Are you sure that it is a fair sample, and that there is any more of it?'

'How can you be so dreadfully provoking, Uncle Sam, when I tell you that I saw it with my own eyes? And there must be at least half a ton of it.'

'Well, half a hundred-weight will be enough for me. And you shall have all the rest, my dear. That is, if you will spare me a bit, Miss Remy. It all belongs to you by discovery, according to the diggers' law. And your eyes are so bright about it, miss, that the whole of your heart must be running upon it.'

'Then you think me as bad as the rest of the world! How I wish that I had never seen it! It was only for you that I cared about it. For you—for you—and I will never touch a scrap of it.'

Mr. Gundry had only been trying me perhaps. But I did not see it in that light, and burst into a flood of childish tears that he should misunderstand me so. Gold had its

usual end in grief. Uncle Sam rose up to soothe me, and to beg my pardon, and to say that perhaps he was harsh, because of the treatment he had received from his friends. He took me in his arms and kissed me; but before I could leave off sobbing the crack of a rifle rang through the house, and Suan Isco, with a wail, rushed out.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SAWYER'S PRAYER.

The darkness of young summer night was falling on earth, and tree, and stream. Everything looked of a different form and colour from those of an hour ago, and the rich bloom of shadow mixed with colour, and cast by snowy mountains, which have stored the purple adieu of the sun, was filling the air with delicious calm. The Sawyer ran out with his shirt-sleeves shining, so that any sneaking foe might shoot him; but with the instinct of a settler he had caught up his rifle. I stood beneath a carob-tree, which had been planted near the porch, and flung fantastic tassels down, like the ear-rings of a negress. And not having sense enough to do good, I was only able to be frightened.

Listening intently, I heard the sound of

skirring steps on the other side of, and some way down, the river; and the peculiar tread, even thus far off, was plainly Suan Isco's. And then, in the stillness, a weary and heavy foot went toiling after it. Before I could follow, which I longed to do, to learn at once the worst of it, I saw the figure of a man much nearer, and even within twenty yards of me, gliding along without any sound. Faint as the light was, I felt sure that it was not one of our own men, and the barrel of a long gun upon his shoulder made a black line among silver leaves. I longed to run forth and stop him, but my courage was not prompt enough; and I shamefully shrank away behind the trunk of the carob-tree. Like a sleuth, compact, and calm-hearted villain, he went along without any breath of sound, stealing his escape with skill, till a white bower-tent made a background for him, and he leaped up, and fell flat without a groan. The crack of a rifle came later than his leap, and a curl of white smoke shone against a black rock, and the Sawyer in the distance cried 'Well now!' as he generally did when satisfied.

So scared was I that I caught hold of a cluster of pods to steady me; and then, without any more fear for myself, I ran to see whether it was possible to help. But the poor man lay beyond earthly help; he was too dead to palpitate. His life must have left him in the air, and he could not even have felt his fall.

In violent terror, I burst into tears, and lifted his heavy head, and strove to force his hot hands open, and did I know not what, without thinking, labouring only to recall his life.

'Are you grieving for the skulk who has shot my Firm?' said a stern voice quite unknown to me; and rising I looked at the face of Mr. Gundry, unlike the countenance of Uncle Sam. I tried to speak to him, but was too frightened. The wrath of blood was in his face, and all his kind desires were gone.

'Yes, like a girl, you are sorry for a man who has stained this earth, till his only atonement is to stain it with his blood. Captain Pedro, there you lie, shot, like a coward, through the back. I wish you were alive to taste my boots. Murderer of men and dastard

ravisher of women, miscreant of God, how can I keep from trampling on you?'

It never had been in my dreams that a good man could so entirely forget himself. I wanted to think that it must be somebody else, and not our Uncle Sam. But he looked towards the west, as all men do when their spirits are full of death, and the wan light showed that his chin was triple.

Whether it may have been right or wrong, I made all haste to get away. The face of the dead man was quite a pleasant thing compared with the face of the old man living. He may not have meant it, and I hope he never did; but, beyond all dispute, he looked barbarous for the moment.

As I slipped away, to know the worst, there I saw him standing still, longing to kick the vile man's corpse, but quieted by the great awe of death. If the man had stirred, or breathed, or even moaned, the living man would have lost all reverence in his fury. But the power of the other world was greater than even revenge could trample on. He let it lie there, and he stooped his head, and went away quite softly.

My little foolish heart was bitterly visited by a thing like this. The Sawyer, though not of great human rank, was gifted with the largest human nature that I had ever met with. And though it was impossible as yet to think, a hollow depression, as at the loss of some great ideal, came over me.

Returning wretchedly to the house, I met Suan Isco and two men bringing the body of poor Firm. His head and both his arms hung down, and they wanted somebody to lift them; and this I ran to do, although they called out to me not to meddle. The body was carried in, and laid upon three chairs, with a pillow at the head; and then a light was struck, and a candle brought by somebody or other. And Suan Isco sat upon the floor, and set up a miserable Indian dirge.

'Stow away that,' cried Martin of the mill, for he was one of those two men; 'wait till the lad is dead, and then pipe up to your liking. I felt him try to kick while we carried him along. He come forth on a arrand of that sort, and he seem to a' been disappointed. A very fine young

chap I call him, for to try to do it still, howsomever his mind might be wandering. Missy, keep his head up.'

I did as I was told, and watched poor Firm as if my own life hung upon any sign of life in him. When I look back at these things, I think that fright, and grief, and pity must have turned an excitable girl almost into a real woman. But I had no sense of such things then.

'I tell you he ain't dead,' cried Martin; 'no more dead than I be. He feels the young gal's hand below him, and I see him try to turn up his eyes. He has taken a very bad knock, no doubt, and trouble about his breathing. I seed a fellow scalped once, and shot through the heart; but he came all round in about six months, and protected his head with a document. Firm, now, don't you be a fool. I have had worse things in my family.'

Ephraim Gundry seemed to know that some one was upbraiding him. At any rate, his white lips trembled with a weak desire to breathe, and a little shadow of life appeared to

flicker in his open eyes. And on my sleeve, beneath his back, some hot bright blood came trickling.

'Keep him to that,' said Martin, with some carpenter sort of surgery; 'less fear of the life when the blood begins to run. Don't move him, missy; never mind your arm. It will be the saving of him.'

I was not strong enough to hold him up, but Suan ran to help me; and they told me afterwards that I fell faint, and no doubt it must have been so. But when the rest were gone, and had taken poor Firm to his straw mattress, the cold night air must have flowed into the room, and that perhaps revived me. I went to the bottom of the stairs and listened, and then stole up to the landing, and heard Suan Isco, who had taken the command, speaking cheerfully in her worst English. Then I hoped for the best, and without any knowledge wandered forth into the open air.

Walking quite as in a dream this time (which I had vainly striven to do when seeking for my nugget), I came to the bank of the

gleaming river, and saw the water just in time to stop from stepping into it. Careless about this and every other thing, for the moment, I threw myself on the sod, and listened to the mournful melody of night. Sundry unknown creatures, which by day keep timid silence, were sending placid sounds into the darkness, holding quiet converse with themselves, or it, or one another. And the silvery murmur of the wavelets soothed the twinkling sleep of leaves.

I also, being worn and weary, and having a frock which improved with washing, and was spoiled already by nursing Firm, was well content to throw myself into a niche of river-bank, and let all things flow past me. But before anything had found time to flow far, or the lullaby of night had lulled me, there came to me a sadder sound than plaintive nature can produce without her Master's aid, the saddest sound in all creation—a strong man's wail.

Child as I was—and perhaps all the more for that reason, as knowing so little of mankind—I might have been more frightened, but I could

not have been a bit more shocked, by the roaring of a lion. For I knew in a moment whose voice it was, and that made it pierce me tenfold. It was Uncle Sam lamenting to himself, and to his God alone, the loss of his last hope on earth. He could not dream that any other than his Maker (and his Maker's works, if ever they have any sympathy) listened to the wild outpourings of an aged but still very natural heart, which had always been proud of controlling itself. I could see his great frame through a willow-tree, with the sere grass and withered reeds around, and the faint gleam of fugitive water beyond. He was kneeling towards his shattered mill, having rolled his shirt-sleeves back to pray, and his white locks shone in the starlight; then, after trying several times, he managed to pray a little. First (perhaps partly from habit), he said the prayer of Our Lord pretty firmly, and then he went on to his own special case, with a doubting whether he should mention it. But as he went on, he gathered courage, or received it from above, and was able to say what he wanted.

'Almighty Father of the living and the dead, I have lived long, and shall soon be dead, and my days have been full of trouble. But I never had such trouble as this here before, and I don't think I ever shall get over it. I have sinned every day of my life, and not thought of Thee, but of victuals, and money, and stuff; and nobody knows, but myself and Thou, all the little bad things inside of me. I cared a deal more to be respectable and get on with my business than to be prepared for kingdom come. And I have just been proud about the shooting of a villain, who might a' gone free and repented. There is nobody left to me in my old age. Thou hast taken all of them. Wife, and son, and mill, and grandson, and my brother who robbed me—the whole of it may have been for my good, but I have got no good out of it. Show me the way for a little time, O Lord, to make the best of it; and teach me to bear it like a man, and not break down at this time of life. Thou knowest what is right. Please to do it. Amen.'

CHAPTER XIV.

NOT FAR TO SEEK.

In the present state of controversies most profoundly religious the Lord alone can decide (though thousands of men would hurry to pronounce) for or against the orthodoxy of the ancient Sawyer's prayer. But if sound doctrine can be established by success (as it always is), Uncle Sam's theology must have been unusually sound; for it pleased a gracious Power to know what he wanted, and to grant it.

Brave as Mr. Gundry was, and much-enduring and resigned, the latter years of his life on earth must have dragged on very heavily, with abstract resignation only, and none of his blood to care for him. Being so obstinate a man, he might have never admitted this, but proved against every one's voice, except his own, his special blessedness. But this must have been a trial to him, and happily he was spared from it.

For although Firm had been very badly shot, and kept us for weeks in anxiety about him, his strong young constitution and well-nourished frame got over it. A truly good and learned doctor came from Sacramento, and we hung upon his words, and found that there he left us hanging. And this was the wisest thing perhaps that he could do, because in America medical men are not absurdly expected, as they are in England, to do any good; but are valued chiefly upon their power of predicting what they cannot help. And this man of science perceived that he might do harm to himself and his family by predicting amiss, whereas he could do no good to his patient by predicting rightly. And so he foretold both good and evil, to meet the intentions of Providence.

He had not been sent for in vain, however; and to give him his due he saved Ephraim's life, for he drew from the wound a large bullet, which, if left, must have poisoned all his circulation, although it was made of pure silver. The Sawyer wished to keep this silver bullet as a token, but the doctor said that it belonged to

him according to miners' law; and so it came to a moderate argument. Each was a thoroughly stubborn man, according to the bent of all good men, and reasoning increased their unreason. But the doctor won, as indeed he deserved, for the extraction had been delicate; because, when reason had been exhausted, he just said this:—

'Colonel Gundry, let us have no more words. The true owner is your grandson. I will put it back where I took it from.'

Upon this, the Sawyer being tickled, as men very often are in sad moments, took the doctor by the hand, and gave him the bullet heartily. And the medical man had a loop made to it, and wore it upon his watch-chain. And he told the story so often (saying that another man perhaps might have got it out, but no other man could have kept it), that among a great race who judge by facts it doubled his practice immediately.

The leader of the robbers, known far and wide as 'Captain Pedro,' was buried where he fell; and the whole so raised Uncle Sam's reputation that his house was never attacked again;

and if any bad characters were forced by circumstances to come near him, they never asked for anything stronger than ginger-beer or lemonade, and departed very promptly. For as soon as Ephraim Gundry could give account of his disaster, it was clear that Don Pedro owed his fate to a bottle of the Sawyer's whiskey. Firm had only intended to give him a lesson for misbehaviour, being fired by his grandfather's words about swinging me on the saddle. This idea had justly appeared to him to demand a protest; to deliver which he at once set forth with a valuable cow-hide whip. Coming thus to the rovers' camp, and finding their captain sitting in the shade to digest his dinner, Firm laid hold of him by the neck and gave way to feelings of severity. Don Pedro regretted his misconduct, and being lifted up for a moment above his ordinary view, perceived that he might have done better, and shaped the pattern of his tongue to it. Firm, hearing this, had good hopes of him; yet knowing how volatile repentance is, he strove to form a well-marked track for it. And when the captain ceased to receive

cow-hide, he must have had it long enough to miss it.

Now this might have ended honourably and amicably for all concerned, if the captain had known when he was well off. Unluckily he had purloined a bottle of Mr. Gundry's whiskey, and he drew the cork now to rub his stripes, and the smell of it moved him to try it inside. And before very long his ideas of honour, which he had sense enough to drop when sober, began to come into his eyes again, and to stir him up to mischief. Hence it was that he followed Firm, who was riding home well satisfied, and appeased his honour by shooting in cold blood, and justice by being shot anyhow.

It was beautiful, through all this trying time, to watch Uncle Sam's proceedings. He appeared so delightfully calm, and almost careless, whenever he was looked at. And then he was ashamed of himself perpetually, if anyone went on with it. Nobody tried to observe him, of course, or remark upon any of his doings, and for this he would become so grate-

ful, that he would long to tell all his thoughts, and then stop. This must have been a great worry to him, seeing how open his manner was; and whenever he wanted to hide anything he informed us of that intention. So that we exhorted Firm every day to come round and restore us to our usual state. This was the poor fellow's special desire; and often he was angry with himself, and made himself worse again by declaring that he must be a milksop to lie there so long. Whereas, it was much more near the truth that few other men, even in the Western States, would ever have got over such a wound. I am not learned enough to say exactly where the damage was, but the doctor called it, I think, the sternum, and pronounced that a 'building-up process' was required, and must take a long time, if it ever could be done.

It was done at last, thanks to Suan Isco, who scarcely ever left him by day or night, and treated him skilfully with healing herbs. But he, without meaning it, vexed her often by calling for me—a mere ignorant child. Suan

was dreadfully jealous of this, and perhaps I was proud of that sentiment of hers, and tried to justify it, instead of labouring to remove it, as would have been the more proper course. And Firm most ungratefully said that my hand was lighter than poor Suan's, and everything I did was better done according to him—which was shameful on his part, and as untrue as anything could be. However, we yielded to him in all things while he was so delicate; and it often made us, poor weak things, cry to be the masters of a tall, strong man.

Firm Gundry received that shot in May, about ten days before the twelvemonth was completed from my father's death. The brightness of summer and beauty of autumn went by without his feeling them, and while his system was working hard to fortify itself by walling-up, as the learned man had called it. There had been some difficulties in this process, caused partly, perhaps, by our too lavish supply of the raw material; and before Firm's gap in his 'sternum' was stopped, the mountains were coming down upon us, as we

always used to say when the snow line stooped. In some seasons this is a sharp time of hurry, broken with storms and capricious, while men have to slur in the driving weather tasks that should have been matured long since. But in other years the long descent into the depth of winter is not taken with a jump like that, but gently, and softly, and windingly, with a great many glimpses back at the summer, and a good deal of leaning on the arm of the sun.

And so it was this time. The autumn and the winter for a fortnight stood looking quietly at each other. They had quite agreed to share the hours, to suit the arrangements of the sun. The nights were starry and fresh and brisk, without any touch of tartness; and the days were sunny and soft and gentle, without any sense of languor. It was a lovely scene; blue shadows gliding among golden light.

The Sawyer came forth, and cried, 'What a shame! This makes me feel quite young again. And yet I have done not a stroke of work. No excuse. Make no excuse. I can do that pretty well for myself. Praise God for all His

mercies. I might do worse, perhaps, than have a pipe.'

Then Firm came out to surprise him, and to please us all with the sight of himself. He steadied his steps with one great white hand upon his grandfather's Sunday staff, and his clear blue eyes were trembling with a sense of gratitude and a fear of tears. And I stepped behind a red strawberry-tree, for my sense of respect for him almost made me sob.

Then Jowler thought it high time to appear upon the scene, and convince us that he was not a dead dog yet. He had known tribulation, as his master had, and had found it a difficult thing to keep from the shadowy hunting-ground of dogs who have lived a conscientious life. I had wondered at first what his reason could have been for not coming forward, according to his custom, to meet that troop of robbers. But his reason, alas, was too cogent to himself, though nobody else in that dreadful time could pay any attention to him. The rovers, well knowing poor Jowler's repute, and declining the fair mode of testing

it, had sent in advance a very crafty scout, a half-bred Indian, who knew as much about dogs as they could ever hope to know about themselves. This rogue approached faithful Jowler —so we were told long afterwards—not in an upright way, but as if he had been a brother quadruped. And he took advantage of the dog's unfeigned surprise and interest to accost him with a piece of kidney containing a powerful poison. According to all sound analogy, this should have stopped the dear fellow's earthly tracks; but his spirit was such that he simply went away to nurse himself up in retirement. Neither man nor dog can tell what agonies he suffered; and doubtless his tortures of mind about duty unperformed were the worst of all. These things are out of human knowledge in its present unsympathetic state. Enough that poor Jowler came home at last, with his ribs all up and his tail very low.

Like friends who have come together again, almost from the jaws of death, we sat in the sunny noon, and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. The trees above us looked proud and cheerful,

laying aside the mere frippery of leaves with a good grace and contented arms, and a surety of having quite enough next spring. Much of the fruity wealth of autumn still was clustering in our sight, heavily fetching the arched bough down, to lessen the fall, when fall they must. And against the golden leaves of maple behind the unpretending roof a special wreath of blue shone like a climbing ipomæa. But coming to examine this, one found it to be nothing more nor less than the smoke of the kitchen chimney, busy with a quiet roasting job.

This shows how clear the air was; but a thousand times as much could never tell how clear our spirits were. Nobody made any 'demonstration,' or cut any frolicsome capers, or even said anything exuberant. The steadfast brooding breed of England, which despises antics, was present in us all, and strengthened by a soil whose native growth is peril, chance, and marvel. And so we nodded at one another, and I ran over and curtseyed to Uncle Sam, and he took me to him.

'You have been a dear good child,' he said,

as he rose, and looked over my head at Firm; 'my own granddarter, if such there had been, could not have done more to comfort me, nor half so much for aught I know. There is no picking and choosing among the females, as God gives them. But He has given you for a blessing and saving to my old age, my dearie.'

'Oh, Uncle Sam, now the nugget!' I cried, desiring like a child to escape deep feeling, and fearing any strong words from Firm. 'You have promised me ever so long that I should be the first to show Firm the nugget.'

'And so you shall, my dear, and Firm shall see it before he is an hour older, and Jowler shall come down to show us where it is.'

Firm, who had little faith in the nugget, but took it for a dream of mine, and had proved conclusively from his pillow that it could not exist in earnest, now with a gentle, satirical smile declared his anxiety to see it; and I led him along by his better arm, faster perhaps than he ought to have walked.

In a very few minutes we were at the place, and I ran eagerly to point it; but, behold,

where the nugget had been there was nothing except the white bed of the river! The blue water flowed very softly on its way, without a gleam of gold to corrupt it.

'Oh, nobody will ever believe me again!' I exclaimed in the saddest of sad dismay. 'I dreamed about it first, but it never can have been a dream throughout. You know that I told you about it, Uncle Sam, even when you were very busy, and that shows that it never could have been a dream.'

'You told me about it, I remember, now,' Mr. Gundry answered dryly; 'but it does not follow that there was such a thing. My dear, you may have imagined it; because it was the proper time for it to come, when my good friends had no money to lend. Your heart was so good that it got into your brain, and you must not be vexed, my dear child; it has done you good to dream of it.'

'I said so all along,' Firm observed; 'Miss Rema felt that it ought to be, and so she believed that it must be there. She is always so warm and trustful.'

'Is that all you are good for?' I cried, with no gratitude for his compliment. 'As sure as I stand here, I saw a great boulder of gold, and so did Jowler; and I gave you the piece that he brought up. Did you take them all in a dream, Uncle Sam? Come, can you get over that?'

I assure you that, for the moment, I knew not whether I stood upon my feet or head, until I perceived an extraordinary grin on the Sawyer's ample countenance; but Firm was not in the secret yet, for he gazed at me with compassion, and Uncle Sam looked at us both, as if he were balancing our abilities.

'Send your dog in, missy,' at last he said; 'he is more your dog than mine, I believe, and he obeys you like a Christian. Let him go and find it if he can.'

At a sign from me the great dog dashed in, and scratched with all four feet at once, and made the valley echo with the ring of mighty barking; and in less than two minutes there shone the nugget, as yellow and as big as ever.

'Ha, ha! I never saw a finer thing,' shouted Uncle Sam, like a schoolboy. 'I were too many for you, missy dear; but the old dog wollops the whole of us. I just shot a barrow-load of gravel on your nugget, to keep it all snug till Firm should come round; and if the boy had never come round, there the gold might have waited the will of the Almighty. It is a big spot anyhow.'

It certainly was not a little spot, though they all seemed to make so light of it—which vexed me, because I had found it, and was as proud as if I had made it. Not by any means that the Sawyer was half as careless as he seemed to be; he put on much of this for my sake, having very lofty principles, especially concerning the duty of the young. Young people were never to have small ideas, so far as he could help it, particularly upon such matters as mammon, or the world, or fashion; and not so very seldom he was obliged to catch himself up in his talking, when he chanced to be going on, and forgetting that I, who required a higher vein of thought for my youth, was taking his

words downright; and I think that all this had a great deal to do with his treating all that gold in such an exemplary manner; for if it had really mattered nothing, what made him go in the dark and shoot a great barrow-load of gravel over it?

CHAPTER XV.

BROUGHT TO BANK.

The sanity of a man is mainly tested among his neighbours and kindred by the amount of consideration which he has consistently given to cash. If money has been the chief object of his life, and he for its sake has spared nobody, no sooner is he known to be successful than admiration overpowers all the ill-will he has caused. He is shrewd, sagacious, long-headed, and great; he has earned his success, and few men grudge, while many seek to get a slice of it; but he, as a general rule, declines any premature distribution: and for this custody of his wealth he is admired all the more by those who have no hope of sharing it.

As soon as ever it was known that Uncle Sam had lodged at his bankers a tremendous lump of gold, which rumour declared to be worth at

least a hundred thousand dollars, friends from every side poured in, all in hot haste, to lend him their last farthing. The Sawyer was pleased with their kindness, but thought that his second-best whiskey met the merits of the case. And he was more particular than usual with his words; for, according to an old saying of the diggers, a big nugget always has children, and, being too heavy to go very far, it is likely to keep all its little ones at home. Many people, therefore, were longing to seek for the frogs of this great toad; for so in their slang the miners called them, with a love of preternatural history. But Mr. Gundry allowed no search for the frogs, or even the tadpoles, of his patriarchal nugget. And much as he hated the idea of sowing the seeds of avarice in any one, he showed himself most consistent now in avoiding that imputation; for not only did he refuse to show the bed of his great treasure, after he had secured it, but he fenced the whole of it in, and tarred the fence and put loopholes in it; and then he established Jowler where he could neither be shot nor poisoned, and kept a man

with a double-barrelled rifle in the ruin of the mill, handy to shoot, but not easy to be shot; and this was a resolute man, being Martin himself, who had now no business. Of course Martin grumbled; but the worse his temper was the better for his duty, as seems to be the case with a great many men; and if anyone had come to console him in his grumbling, never would he have gone away again.

It would have been reckless of me to pretend to say what anybody ought to do; from the first to the last I left everything to those who knew so much better; at the same time, I felt that it might have done no harm if I had been more consulted, though I never dreamed of saying so, because the great gold had been found by me, and although I cared for it scarcely more than for the tag of a boot-lace, nobody seemed to me able to enter into it quite as I did; and as soon as Firm's danger and pain grew less, I began to get rather impatient, but Uncle Sam was not to be hurried.

Before ever he hoisted that rock of gold he had made up his mind for me to be there, and

he even put the business off, because I would not come one night, for I had a superstitious fear on account of its being my father's birthday. Uncle Sam had forgotten the date, and begged my pardon for proposing it; but he said that we must not put it off later than the following night, because the moonlight would be failing, and we durst not have any kind of lamp, and before the next moon the hard weather might begin. All this was before the liberal offers of his friends, of which I have spoken first, although they happen to come after it.

While the Sawyer had been keeping the treasure *perdu*, to abide the issue of his grandson's illness, he had taken good care both to watch it and to form some opinion of its shape and size; for, knowing the pile which I had described, he could not help finding it easily enough; and, indeed, the great fear was that others might find it, and come in great force to rob him; but nothing of that sort had happened, partly because he held his tongue rigidly, and partly, perhaps, because of the simple precaution which he had taken.

Now, however, it was needful to impart the secret to one man at least; for Firm, though recovering, was still so weak that it might have killed him to go into the water, or even to exert himself at all; and, strong as Uncle Sam was, he knew that even with hoisting-tackle he alone could never bring that piece of bullion to bank; so, after much consideration, he resolved to tell Martin of the mill, as being the most trusty man about the place, as well as the most surly; but he did not tell him until everything was ready, and then he took him straightway to the place.

Here, in the moonlight, we stood waiting, Firm and myself and Suan Isco, who had more dread than love of gold, and might be useful to keep watch, or even to lend a hand, for she was as strong as an ordinary man. The night was sultry, and the fire-flies (though dull in the radiance of the moon) darted, like soft little shooting-stars, across the still face of shadow, and the flood of the light of the moon was at its height, submerging everything.

While we were whispering and keeping in

the shade, for fear of attracting any wanderer's notice, we saw the broad figure of the Sawyer rising from a hollow of the bank, and behind him came Martin the foreman, and we soon saw that due preparation had been made, for they took from under some driftwood (which had prevented us from observing it) a small moveable crane, and fixed it on a platform of planks which they set up in the river-bed.

'Pale-faces eat gold,' Suan Isco said, reflectively, and as if to satisfy herself. 'Dem eat, drink, die gold; den pull gold out of one other's ears. Welly hope Mellican mans get enough gold now.'

'Don't be sarcastic, now, Suan,' I answered; 'as if it were possible to have enough!'

'For my part,' said Firm, who had been unusually silent all the evening, 'I wish it had never been found at all. As sure as I stand here, mischief will come of it. It will break up our household. I hope it will turn out a lump of quartz, gilt on the face, as those big nuggets do, ninety-nine out of a hundred. I have had no faith in it all along.'

'Because I found it, Mr. Firm, I suppose,' I answered rather pettishly, for I never had liked Firm's incessant bitterness about my nugget. 'Perhaps if you had found it, Mr. Firm, you would have great faith in it.'

'Can't say, can't say,' was all Firm's reply; and he fell into the silent vein again.

'Heave-ho! heave-ho! there, you sons of cooks!' cried the Sawyer, who was splashing for his life in the water. 'I've tackled un now. Just tighten up the belt, to see if he biteth centre-like. You can't lift un! Lord bless 'ee, not you. It'll take all I know to do that, I guess; and Firm ain't to lay no hand to it. Don't you be in such a doggoned hurry. Hold hard, can't you?'

For Susan and Martin were hauling for their lives, and even I caught hold of a rope-end, but had no idea what to do with it, when the Sawyer swung himself up to bank, and in half a minute all was orderly. He showed us exactly where to throw our weight, and he used his own to such good effect that, after some creaking and groaning, the long bill of the

crane rose steadily, and a mass of dripping sparkles shone in the moonlight over the water.

'Hurrah! What a whale! How the tough ash bends!' cried Uncle Sam, panting like a boy, and doing nearly all the work himself. Martin, lay your chest to it. We'll grass him in two seconds. Californy never saw a sight like this, I reckon.'

There was plenty of room for us all to stand round the monster and admire it. In shape it was just like a fat toad, squatting with his shoulders up, and panting. Even a rough resemblance to the head and the haunches might be discovered, and a few spots of quartz shone here and there on the glistening and bossy surface. Some of us began to feel and handle it with vast admiration; but Firm, with his heavy boots, made a vicious kick at it, and a few bright scales, like sparks, flew off.

'Why, what ails the lad?' cried the Sawyer in some wrath; 'what harm hath the stone ever done to him? To my mind, this here lump is a proof of the whole creation of the world, and who hath lived long enough to gainsay?

Here this lump hath lain, without changing colour, since creation's day; here it is, as big and heavy as when the Lord laid hand to it. What good to argue agin' such facts? Supposin' the world come out o' nothing, with nobody to fetch it, or to say a word of orders, however could it a' managed to get a lump of gold like this in it? They clever fellows is too clever. Let 'em put all their heads together, and turn out a nugget, and I'll believe them.'

Uncle Sam's reasoning was too deep for any but himself to follow. He was not long in perceiving this, though we were content to admire his words, without asking him to explain them; so he only said, 'Well, well,' and began to try with both hands if he could heft this lump. He stirred it, and moved it, and raised it a little, as the glisten of the light upon its roundings showed; but lift it fairly from the ground he could not, however he might bow his sturdy legs and bend his mighty back to it; and, strange to say, he was pleased for once to acknowledge his own discomfiture.

'Five hundred and a half I used to lift to

the height of my kneecap easily; I may a' fallen off now a hundredweight with years, and strings in my back, and rheumatics; but this here little toad is a clear hundredweight out and beyond my heftage. If there's a pound here, there's not an ounce under six hundredweight, I'll lay a thousand dollars. Miss Rema, give a name to him. All the thundering nuggets has thundering names.'

'Then this shall be called "Uncle Sam,"' I answered, 'because he is the largest and the best of all.'

'It shall stand, miss,' cried Martin, who was in great spirits, and seemed to have bettered himself for ever. 'You could not have given it a finer name, miss, if you had considered for a century. Uncle Sam is the name of our glorious race, from the kindness of our natur'. Everybody's uncle we are now in vartue of superior knowledge, and freedom, and giving of general advice, and stickin' to all the world, or all the good of it. Darned if old Sam aren't the front of creation!'

'Well, well,' said the Sawyer, 'let us call it

"Uncle Sam," if the dear young lady likes it; it would be bad luck to change the name; but for all that, we must look uncommon sharp, or some of our glorious race will come and steal it afore we unbutton our eyes.'

'Pooh!' cried Martin, but he knew very well that his master's words were common sense; and we left him on guard with a double-barrelled gun, and Jowler to keep watch with him. And the next day he told us that he had spent the night in such a frame of mind from continual thought, that when our pet cow came to drink at daybreak, it was but the blowing of her breath that saved her from taking a bullet between her soft, tame eyes.

Now, it could not in any kind of way hold good that such things should continue; and the Sawyer, though loth to lose sight of the nugget, perceived that he must not sacrifice all the morals of the neighbourhood to it; and he barely had time to despatch it on its road at the bottom of a load of lumber, with Martin to drive, and Jowler to sit up, and Firm to ride behind, when a troop of mixed robbers came

riding across, with a four-wheel cart and two sturdy mules, enough to drag off everything. They had clearly heard of the golden toad, and desired to know more of him; but Uncle Sam, with his usual blandness, met these men at the gate of his yard, and upon the top rail, to ease his arm, he rested a rifle of heavy metal, with seven revolving chambers. The robbers found out that they had lost their way, and Mr. Gundry answered that so they had, and the sooner they found it in another direction the better it would be for them. They thought that he had all his men inside, and they were mighty civil, though we had only two negroes to help us, and Suan Isco, with a great gun cocked. But their curiosity was such that they could not help asking about the gold; and, sooner than shoot them, Uncle Sam replied that, upon his honour, the nugget was gone. And the fame of his word was so well known that these fellows (none of whom could tell the truth even at confession) believed him on the spot, and begged his pardon for trespassing on his premises. They hoped that he would not say a

word to the Vigilance Committee, who hanged a poor fellow for losing his road; and he told them that if they made off at once nobody should pursue them, and so they rode off very happily.

CHAPTER XVI.

FIRM AND INFIRM.

STRANGE as it may appear, our quiet little home was not yet disturbed by that great discovery of gold. The Sawyer went up to the summit of esteem in public opinion; but to himself and to us he was the same as ever. He worked with his own hard hands and busy head just as he used to do; for although the mill was still in ruins, there was plenty of the finer work to do, which always required hand-labour. And at night he would sit at the end of the table furthest from the fireplace, with his spectacles on and his red cheeks glowing, while he designed the future mill, which was to be built in the spring, and transcend every mill ever heard, thought, or dreamt of.

We all looked forward to a quiet winter, snug with warmth and cheer indoors, and bright

outside with sparkling trees, brisk air, and frosty appetite; when a foolish idea arose, which spoiled the comfort at least of two of us. Ephraim Gundry found out, or fancied, that he was entirely filled with love of a very young maid, who never dreamt of such things, and hated even to hear of them; and the maid, unluckily, was myself.

During the time of his ailment I had been with him continually, being only too glad to assuage his pain or turn his thoughts away from it. I partly suspected that he had incurred his bitter wound for my sake; though I never imputed his zeal to more than a young man's natural wrath at an outrage. But now he left me no longer in doubt, and made me most uncomfortable. Perhaps I was hard upon him, and afterwards I often thought so, for he was very kind and gentle; but I was an orphan child, and had no one to advise me in such matters. I believe that he should have considered this, and allowed me to grow a little older; but perhaps he himself was too young as yet, and too bashful, to know how to

manage things. It was the very evening after his return from Sacramento, and the beauty of the weather still abode in the soft warm depth around us. In every tint of rock and tree, and playful glass of river, a quiet clearness seemed to lie, and a rich content of colour. The grandeur of the world was such that one could only rest among it, seeking neither voice nor thought.

Therefore I was more surprised than pleased to hear my name ring loudly through the echoing hollows, and then to see the bushes shaken and an eager form leap out. I did not answer a word, but sat with a wreath of white bouvardia and small adiantum round my head, which I had plaited anyhow.

'What a lovely dear you are!' cried Firm; and then he seemed frightened at his own words.

'I had no idea that you would have finished your dinner so soon as this, Mr. Firm.'

'And you did not want me. You are vexed to see me. Tell the truth, Miss Rema.'

'I always tell the truth,' I answered; 'and

I did not want to be disturbed just now. I have so many things to think of.'

'And not me among them. Oh no, of course, you never think of me, Erema.'

'It is very unkind of you to say that,' I answered, looking clearly at him, as a child looks at a man. 'And it is not true, I assure you, Firm. Whenever I have thought of dear Uncle Sam, I very often go on to think of you, because he is so fond of you.'

'But not for my own sake, Erema; you never think of me for my own sake.'

'But yes I do, I assure you, Mr. Firm; I do greatly. There is scarcely a day that I do not remember how hungry you are, and I think of you.'

'Tush!' replied Firm, with a lofty gaze. 'Even for a moment that does not in any way express my meaning. My mind is very much above all eating when it dwells upon you, Erema. I have always been fond of you, Erema.'

'You have always been good to me, Firm,' I said, as I managed to get a great branch between us. 'After your grandfather, and Suan

Isco, and Jowler, I think that I like you best of almost anybody left to me. And you know that I never forget your slippers.'

'Erema, you drive me almost wild by never understanding me. Now, will you just listen to a little common sense? You know that I am not romantic.'

'Yes, Firm; yes, I know that you never did anything wrong in any way.'

'You would like me better if I did. What an extraordinary thing it is! Oh, Erema, I beg your pardon.'

He had seen in a moment, as men seem to do when they study the much quicker face of a girl, that his words had keenly wounded me—that I had applied them to my father, of whom I was always thinking, though I scarcely ever spoke of him. But I knew that Firm had meant no harm, and I gave him my hand, though I could not speak.

'My darling,' he said, 'you are very dear to me, dearer than all the world beside. I will not worry you any more. Only say that you do not hate me.'

'How could I? How could anybody? Now let us go in, and attend to Uncle Sam. He thinks of everybody before himself.'

'And I think of everybody after myself. Is that what you mean, Erema?'

'To be sure! If you like; you may put any meaning on my words that you think proper. I am accustomed to things of that sort, and I pay no attention whatever when I am perfectly certain that I am right.'

'I see,' replied Firm, applying one finger to the side of his nose, in deep contemplation, which, of all his manners, annoyed me most, that nose being slightly crooked; 'I see how it is; Miss Rema is always perfectly certain that she is right, and the whole of the rest of the world quite wrong. Well, after all, there is nothing like holding a first-rate opinion of oneself.'

'You are not what I thought of you,' I cried, being vexed beyond bearance by such words, and feeling their gross injustice; 'if you wish to say anything more, please to leave it until you recover your temper. I am not quite accustomed to rudeness.'

With these words I drew away and walked off, partly in earnest and partly in joke, not wishing to hear another word. And when I looked back, being well out of sight, there he sat still, with his head on his hands, and my heart had a little ache for him.

However, I determined to say no more, and to be extremely careful. I could not in justice blame Ephraim Gundry for looking at me very often. But I took good care not to look at him again, unless he said something that made me laugh, and then I could scarcely help it. He was sharp enough very soon to find out this; and then he did a thing which was most unfair, as I found out long afterwards. He bought an American jest-book, full of ideas wholly new to me, and these he committed to heart, and brought them out as his own productions. If I had only known it, I must have been exceedingly sorry for him. But Uncle Sam used to laugh, and rub his hands, perhaps for old acquaintance sake; and when Uncle Sam laughed, there was nobody near who could help laughing with him. And so I began to

think Firm the most witty and pleasant of men, though I tried to look away.

But perhaps the most careful and delicate of things was to see how Uncle Sam went on. I could not understand him at all just then, and thought him quite changed from my old Uncle Sam; but afterwards, when I came to know, his behaviour was as clear and shallow as the water of his own river. He had very strange ideas about what he generally called 'the female kind.' According to his ideas (and perhaps they were not so unusual among mankind, especially settlers), all 'females' were of a good, but weak and consistently inconsistent sort. The surest way to make them do whatever their betters wanted was to make them think that it was not wanted, but was hedged with obstacles beyond their power to overcome; and so to provoke and tantalise them to set their hearts upon doing it. In accordance with this idea (than which there can be none more mistaken) he took the greatest pains to keep me from having a word to say to Firm, and even went so far as to hint with winks and nods of pleasantry

that his grandson's heart was set upon the pretty Miss Sylvester, the daughter of a man who owned a herd of pigs much too near our sawmills, and herself a young woman of outrageous dress, and in a larger light contemptible. But when Mr. Gundry, without any words, conveyed this piece of news to me, I immediately felt quite a liking for gaudy but harmless Pennsylvania—for so her parents had named her, when she was too young to help it—and I heartily hoped that she might suit Firm, which she seemed all the more likely to do as his conduct could not be called noble. Upon that point, however, I said not a word, leaving him purely to judge for himself, and feeling it a great relief that now he could not say anything more to me. I was glad that his taste was so easily pleased; and I told Suan Isco how glad I was.

This I had better have left unsaid; for it led to a great explosion, and drove me away from the place altogether, before the new mill was finished, and before I should otherwise have gone from friends who were so good to me—

not that I could have stayed there much longer, even if this had never come to pass; for week by week, and month by month, I was growing more uneasy. Uneasy, not at my obligations, or dependence upon mere friends (for they managed that so kindly that I seemed to confer the favour), but from my own sense of lagging far behind my duty.

For now the bright air, and the wholesome food, and the pleasure of goodness around me, were making me grow, without knowledge or notice, into a tall and not altogether to be overlooked young woman. I was exceedingly shy about this, and blushed if anyone spoke of it; but yet in my heart I felt that it was so, and how could I help it? And when people said, as rough people will, and even Uncle Sam sometimes, 'Handsome is as handsome does,' or 'Beauty is only skin deep,' and so on, I made it my duty not to be put out, but to bear it in mind, and be thankful. And though I had no idea of any such influence at the moment, I hope that the grandeur of nature around, and the lofty style of everything, may have saved

me from dwelling too much on myself, as Pennsylvania Sylvester did.

Now, the more I felt my grown-up age, and health, and buoyant vigour, the surer I knew that the time was come for me to do some good with them. Not to benefit the world in general, in a large and scattery way (as many young people set out to do, and never get any further), but to right the wrong of my own house, and bring home justice to my own heart. This may be thought a partial and paltry object to set out with; and it is not for me to say otherwise. At the time, it occurred to me in no other light except as my due business, and I never took any large view at all. But even now I do believe (though not yet in pickle of wisdom) that if everybody, in its own little space and among its own little movements, will only do and take nothing without pure taste of the salt of justice, no reeking atrocity of national crimes could ever taint the heaven.

Such questions, however, become me not. I have only to deal with very little things, sometimes too slim to handle well, and too

sleezy to be woven; and if they seem below my sense and dignity to treat of, I can only say that they seemed very big at the time when I had to encounter them. For instance, what could be more important, in a little world of life, than for Uncle Sam to be put out, and dare even to think ill of me? Yet this he did; and it shows how shallow are all those theories of the other sex which men are so pleased to indulge in. Scarcely anything could be more ridiculous from first to last, when calmly and truly considered, than the firm belief which no power of reason could, for the time, root out of him.

Uncle Sam, the dearest of all mankind to me, and the very kindest, was positively low enough to believe, in his sad opinion of the female race, that my young head was turned because of the wealth to which I had no claim, except through his own justice. He had insisted, at first, that the whole of that great nugget belonged to me by right of sole discovery. I asked him whether, if any stranger had found it, it would have been considered his; and

whether he would have allowed a 'greaser,' upon finding, to make off with it. At the thought of this, Mr. Gundry gave a little grunt, and could not go so far as to maintain that view of it. But he said that my reasoning did not fit; that I was not a greaser, but a settled inhabitant of the place, and entitled to all a settler's rights. That the bed of the river would have been his grave, but for the risk of my life; and therefore whatever I found in the bed of the river belonged to me, and me only.

In argument he was so much stronger than I could ever attempt to be that I gave it up, and could only say that if he argued for ever it could never make any difference. He did not argue for ever, but only grew obstinate and unpleasant, so that I yielded at last to own the half share of the bullion.

Very well. Everybody would have thought, who has not studied the nature of men, or been dragged through it heavily, that now there could be no more trouble between two people entirely trusting each other, and only anxious that the other should have the best of it. Yet,

instead of that being the case, the mischief, the myriad mischief of money set in; until I heartily wished sometimes that my miserable self was down in the hole which the pelf had left behind it.

For what did Uncle Sam take into his head (which was full of generosity and large ideas, so loosely packed that little ones grew between them, especially about womankind), what else did he really seem to think, with the downright stubbornness of all his thoughts, but that I, his poor debtor and pensioner and penniless dependant, was so set up and elated by this sudden access of fortune, that henceforth none of the sawing race was high enough for me to think of. It took me a long time to believe that so fair and just a man ever could set such construction upon me. And when it became too plain that he did so, truly I know not whether grief or anger was uppermost in my troubled heart.

CHAPTER XVII.

HARD AND SOFT.

Before very long it was manifest enough that Mr. Gundry looked down upon Miss Sylvester with a large contempt. But while this raised my opinion of his judgment, it almost deprived me of a great relief, the relief of supposing that he wished his grandson to marry this Pennsylvania. For although her father, with his pigs and cattle, and a low sort of hostelry which he kept, could settle 'a good pile of dollars' upon her, and had kept her at the 'learnedest ladies' college' even in San Francisco, till he himself trembled at her erudition, still it was scarcely to be believed that a man of the Sawyer's strong common sense and disregard of finery, would ever accept for his grandchild a girl made of affectation, vulgarity, and conceit. And one day, quite in the early spring, he was

so much vexed with the fine lady's airs that he left no doubt about his meaning.

Miss Sylvester was very proud of the figure she made on horseback; and having been brought up, perhaps as a child, to ride after pigs and so on, she must have had fine opportunities of acquiring a graceful style of horsemanship. And now she dashed through thick and thin in a most commanding manner, caring no more for a snowdrift than ladies do for a scraping of the road. No one with the least observation could doubt that this young woman was extremely anxious to attract Firm Gundry's notice; and therefore, on the day above spoken of, once more she rode over, with her poor father in waiting upon her, as usual.

Now I know very well how many faults I have, and to deny them has never been my practice; but this is the honest and earnest truth, that no smallness of mind, or narrowness of feeling, or want of large or fine sentiments, made me bolt my door when that girl was in the house. I simply refused, after seeing her once, to have anything more to say to her; by no means because of my birth and breeding

(which are things that can be most easily waived when the difference is acknowledged), nor yet on account of my being brought up in the company of ladies, nor even by reason of any dislike which her bold brown eyes put into me. My cause was sufficient, and just, and wise. I felt myself here as a very young girl, in safe, and pure, and honest hands, yet thrown on my own discretion, without any feminine guidance whatever. And I had learned enough from the wise French Sisters to know at a glance that Miss Sylvester was not a young woman who would do me good.

Even Uncle Sam, who was full of thought and delicate care about me, so far as a man can understand, and so far as his simple shrewdness went, in spite of all his hospitable ways and open universal welcome, though he said not a word (as on such a point he was quite right in doing)—even he, as I knew by his manner, was quite content with my decision. But Firm, being young, and in many ways stupid, made a little grievance of it. And, of course, Miss Sylvester made a great one.

'Oh, I do declare, I am going away,' through

my open window I heard her exclaim in her sweetly affected tone, at the end of that long visit, ‘ without even having the honour of saying a kind word to your young visitor. Do not wait for me, papa; I must pay my devoirs. Such a distinguished and travelled person can hardly be afflicted with *mauvaise honte*. Why does she not rush to embrace me? All the French people do; and she is so French. Let me see her, for the sake of my accent.’

‘We don’t want no French here, ma’am,’ replied Uncle Sam, as Sylvester rode off, ‘and the young lady wants no Doctor Hunt. Her health is as good as your own, and you never catch no French actions from her. If she wanted to see you, she would a’ come down.’

‘ Oh, now, this is too barbarous! Colonel Gundry, you are the most tyrannous man; in your own dominions an autocrat. Everybody says so, but I never would believe it. Oh, don’t let me go away with that impression. And you do look so good-natured.’

‘ And so I mean to look, Miss Penny, until you are out of sight.’

The voice of the Sawyer was more dry than

that of his oldest and rustiest saw. The fashionable and highly-finished girl had no idea what to make of him; but gave her young horse a sharp cut, to show her figure as she reined him: and then galloping off, she kissed her tan gauntlet with crimson network down it, and left Uncle Sam to revolve his rudeness, with the dash of the wet road scattered in the air.

'I wouldn't a' spoke to her so coarse,' he said to Firm, who now returned from opening the gate and delivering his farewell, 'if she wasn't herself so extra particular, gild me, and sky-blue my mouldings fine. How my mother would a' stared at the sight of such a gal! Keep free of her, my lad, keep free of her. But no harm to put her on, to keep our missy alive and awake, my boy.'

Immediately I withdrew from earshot, more deeply mortified than I can tell, and perhaps doing Firm an injustice by not waiting for his answer. I knew not then how lightly men will speak of such delicate subjects; and it set me more against all thoughts of Firm than a month's reflection could have done. When I came to

know more of the world I saw that I had been very foolish. At the time, however, I was firmly set in a strong resolve to do that which alone seemed right, or even possible—to quit with all speed a place which could no longer be suited for me.

For several days I feared to say a single word about it, while equally I condemned myself for having so little courage. But it was not as if there were anybody to help me, or tell me what to do; sometimes I was bold with a surety of right, and then again I shook with the fear of being wrong. Because, through the whole of it, I felt how wonderfully well I had been treated, and what a great debt I owed of kindness; and it seemed to be only a nasty little pride which made me so particular. And being so unable to settle for myself, I waited for something to settle it.

Something came, in a way which I had not by any means expected. I had told Suan Isco how glad I was that Firm had fixed his liking steadily upon Miss Sylvester. If any woman on earth could be trusted not to say a thing

again, that one was this good Indian. Not only because of her provident habits, but also in right of the difficulty which encompassed her in our language. But she managed to get over both of these, and to let Mr. Ephraim know, as cleverly as if she had lived in drawing-rooms, whatever I had said about him. She did it for the best; but it put him in a rage, which he came at once to have out with me.

'And so, Miss Erema,' he said, throwing down his hat upon the table of the little parlour, where I sat with an old book of Norman ballads; 'I have your best wishes then, have I, for a happy marriage with Miss Sylvester?'

I was greatly surprised at the tone of his voice, while the flush on his cheeks and the flash of his eyes, and even his quick heavy tread, showed plainly that his mind was a little out of balance. He deserved it, however, and I could not grieve.

'You have my best wishes,' I replied demurely, 'for any state of life to which you may be called. You could scarcely expect any less of me than that.'

'How kind you are! But do you really wish that I should marry old Sylvester's girl?'

Firm, as he asked this question, looked so bitterly reproachful (as if he were saying, 'Do you wish to see me hanged?') while his eyes took a form which reminded me so of the Sawyer in a furious puzzle, that it was impossible for me to answer as lightly as I meant to do.

'No, I cannot say, Firm, that I wish it at all; unless your heart is set on it——'

'Don't you know then where my heart is set?' he asked me in a deep voice, coming nearer, and taking the ballad-book from my hands. 'Why will you feign not to know, Erema, who is the only one I can ever think of twice? Above me, I know, in every possible way—birth and education, and mind and appearance, and now far above me in money as well. But what are all these things? Try to think, if only you could like me. Liking gets over everything; and without it, nothing is anything. Why do I like you so, Erema? Is it because of your birth, and teaching, and

manners, and sweet looks, and all that; or even because of your troubles?'

'How can I tell, Firm, how can I tell? Perhaps it is just because of myself. And why do you do it at all, Firm?'

'Ah, why do I do it? How I wish I knew; perhaps then I might cure it. To begin with, what is there, after all, so very wonderful about you?'

'Oh nothing, I should hope. Most surely nothing. It would grieve me to be at all wonderful. That I leave for American ladies.'

'Now you don't understand me. I mean of course that you are wonderfully good, and kind, and clever; and your eyes, I am sure, and your lips, and smile, and all your other features—there is nothing about them that can be called anything else but wonderful.'

'Now, Firm, how exceedingly foolish you are! I did hope that you knew better.'

'Erema, I never shall know better. I never can swerve or change, if I live to be a hundred and fifty. You think me presumptuous, no doubt, from what you are brought up to. And

you are so young, that to seek to bind you, even if you loved me, would be an unmanly thing. But now you are old enough, and you know your own mind surely well enough, just to say whether you feel as if you could ever love me as I love you.'

He turned away, as if he felt that he had no right to press me so, and blamed himself for selfishness; and I liked him better for doing that than for anything he had done before. Yet I knew that I ought to speak clearly, and though my voice was full of tears, I tried.

'Dear Firm,' I said, as I took his hand, and strove to look at him steadily, 'I like and admire you very much; and by and bye—by and bye I might—that is, if you did not hurry me. Of all the obstacles you have mentioned, none is worth considering. I am nothing but a poor castaway, owing my life to Uncle Sam and you. But one thing there is which could never be got over, even if I felt as you feel towards me. Never can I think of little matters, or of turning my thoughts to—to any such things as you speak of, as long as a vile reproach and wicked

imputation lies on me. And before even that, I have to think of my father, who gave his life for me. Firm, I have been here too long delaying, and wasting my time in trifles. I ought to have been in Europe long ago. If I am old enough for what you talk of, I am old enough to do my duty. If I am old enough for love, as it is called, I am old enough for hate. I have more to do with hate than love, I think.'

'Erema,' cried Firm, 'what a puzzle you are! I never even dreamed that you could be so fierce. You are enough to frighten Uncle Sam himself.'

'If I frighten you, Firm, that is quite enough. You see now how vain it is to say another word.'

'I do not see anything of the sort. Come back, and look at me quite calmly.'

Being frightened at the way in which I had spoken, and having passed the prime of it, I obeyed him in a moment, and came up gently, and let him look at me, to his liking. For, little as I thought of such things till now, I seemed already to know more about them, or at least

to wonder—which is the stir of the curtain of knowledge. I did not say anything, but laboured to think nothing, and to look up with unconscious eyes. But Firm put me out altogether by his warmth, and made me flutter like a stupid little bird.

'My darling,' he said, smoothing back my hair, with a kindness such as I could not resent, and quieting me with his clear blue eyes, 'you are not fit for the stormy life to which your high spirit is devoting you. You have not the hardness and bitterness of mind, the cold self-possession and contempt of others, the power of dissembling and the iron will—in a word, the fundamental nastiness, without which you never could get through such a job. Why, you cannot be contemptuous even to me!'

'I should hope not. I should earn your contempt, if I could.'

'There, you are ready to cry at the thought. Erema, do not mistake yourself. Remember that your father would never have wished it—would have given his life ten thousand times over to prevent it. Why did he bring you to

this remote, inaccessible part of the world, except to save you from further thought of evil? He knew that we listen to no rumours here, no social scandals or malignant lies; but we value people as we find them. He meant this to be a haven for you; and so it shall be, if you will only rest; and you shall be the queen of it. Instead of redressing his memory now, you would only distress his spirit. What does he care for the world's gossip now? But he does care for your happiness. I am not old enough to tell you things as I should like to tell them. I wish I could—how I wish I could! It would make all the difference to me.'

'It would make no difference, Firm, to me, because I should know it was selfishness. Not selfishness of yours, I mean, for you never could be selfish—but the vilest selfishness of mine, the same as starved my father. You cannot see things as I see them, or else you would not talk so. When you know that a thing is right, you do it. Can you tell me otherwise? If you did, I should despise you?'

'If you put it so, I can say no more. You will leave us for ever, Erema?'

'No, not for ever. If the good God wills it, I will come back when my work is done. Forgive me, dear Firm, and forget me.'

'There is nothing to forgive, Erema. But a great deal I never can hope to forget.'

CHAPTER XVIII.

OUT OF THE GOLDEN GATE.

LITTLE things, or what we call little, always will come in among great ones, or at least among those which we call great. Before I passed the Golden Gate, in the clipper ship *Bridal Veil* (so called from one of the Yosemite cascades), I found out what I had long wished to know, why Firm had a crooked nose.

At least, it could hardly be called crooked, if anybody looked right at it. But still it departed from the bold straight line which nature must have meant for it, everything else about him being as right as could be required. This subject had troubled me more than once; though, of course, it had nothing whatever to do with the point of view whence I regarded him.

Suan Isco could not tell me, neither could

Martin of the mill; I certainly could not ask Firm himself, as the Sawyer told me to do, when once I put the question, in despair, to him. But now, as we stood on the wharf, exchanging farewells perhaps for ever, and tears of anguish were in my eyes, and my heart was both full and empty, ample and unexpected light was thrown on the curvature of Firm's nose.

For a beautiful girl, of about my own age and very nicely dressed, came up, and spoke to the Sawyer (who stood at my side), and then with a blush took his grandson's hand. Firm took off his hat to her very politely, but allowed her to see perhaps by his manner that he was particularly engaged just now; and the young lady, with a quick glance at me, walked off to rejoin her party. But a garrulous old negro servant, who seemed to be in attendance upon her, ran up and caught Firm by his coat, and peered up curiously at his face.

'How young massa's poor nose dis long time? How him feel, spose now again?'—he inquired with a deferential grin. 'Young massa ebber able take a pinch of good snuff? He, he,

missy berry heavy den. Missy no learn to dance de nose polka den?'

'What on earth does he mean?' I could not help asking, in spite of our sorrowful farewell, as the negro went on with sundry other jokes and cackles at his own facetiousness. And then Uncle Sam, to divert my thoughts while I waited for signal to say good-bye, told me how Firm got a slight twist to his nose.

Ephraim Gundry had been well taught, in all the common things a man should learn, at a good quiet school at 'Frisco,' which distinguished itself from all other schools by not calling itself a college. And when he was leaving to begin home-life, with as much put into him as he could manage—for his nature was not bookish—when he was just seventeen years old, and tall, and straight, and upright, but not set into great bodily strength, which could not yet be expected, a terrible fire broke out in a great block of houses newly occupied, over against the schoolhouse front. Without waiting for master's leave or matron's, the boys, in the Californian style, jumped over the fencing

and went to help. And they found a great crowd collected, and flames flaring out of the top of the house. At the top of the house, according to a stupid and therefore general practice, was the nursery, made of more nurses than children, as often happens with rich people. The nurses had run away for their lives, taking two of the children with them; but the third, a fine little girl of ten, had been left behind, and now ran to the window, with red hot flames behind her. The window was open, and barbs of fire, like serpents' tongues, played over it.

'Jump, child, jump! for God's sake, jump!' cried half a hundred people, while the poor scared creature quivered on the ledge, and shrank from the frightful depth below. At last, stung by a scorching volley, she gathered her night-gown tight, and leaped, trusting to the many faces and the many arms raised towards her. But though many gallant men were there, only one stood fast just where she fell, and that one was the youth, Firm Gundry. Upon him she fell like a stone from heaven, and though

he held up his arms, in the smoky glare, she came down badly. Badly at least for him, but, as her father said, providentially, for one of her soles, or heels, alighted on the bridge of Ephraim's young nose. He caught her on his chest, and, forgetful of himself, he bore her to her friends triumphantly, unharmed, and almost smiling. But the symmetry of an important part of his face was spoiled for ever.

When I heard of this noble affair, and thought of my own pusillanimous rendering—for verily I had been low enough, from rumours of Firm's pugnacity, to attribute these little defects of line to some fisticuffs with some miner—I looked at Firm's nose through the tears in my eyes, and had a great mind not to go away at all. For what is the noblest of all things in man?—as I bitterly learned thereafter, and already had some guesses—not the power of moving multitudes with eloquence or by orders, not the elevation of one tribe through the lowering of others, nor even the imaginary lift of all by sentiments as yet above them: there may be glory in all of these, but the greatness is

not with them. It remains with those who behave like Firm, and get their noses broken.

However, I did not know those things at that time of life, though I thought it right for every man to be brave and good; and I could not help asking who the young lady was, as if that were part of the heroism. The Sawyer, who never was unready for a joke, of however ancient quality, gave a great wink at Firm (which I failed to understand), and asked him how much the young lady was worth. He expected that Firm would say, 'Five hundred thousand dollars'—which was about her value, I believe—and Uncle Sam wanted me to hear it; not that he cared a single cent himself, but to let me know what Firm could do.

Firm, however, was not to be led into any trap of that sort. He knew me better than the old man did, and that nothing would stir me to jealousy; and he quite disappointed the Sawyer.

'I have never asked what she is worth,' he said, with a glance of contempt at money; 'but she scarcely seems worth looking at, compared—compared with certain others.'

In the distance I saw the young lady again, attempting no attraction, but walking along quite harmlessly, with the talkative negro after her. It would have been below me to pursue the subject, and I waited for others to reopen it; but I heard no more about her until I had been for more than a week at sea, and was able again to feel interest. Then I heard that her name was Annie Banks, of the firm of Heniker, Banks, & Co., who owned the ship I sailed in.

But now it was nothing to me who she was, or how beautiful, or how wealthy, when I clung for the last time to Uncle Sam, and implored him not to forget me. Over and over again he promised to be full of thoughts of me; even when the new mill was started, which would be a most trying time. He bowed his tall white head into my shevelled hair, and blessed and kissed me, although I never deserved it, and a number of people were looking on. Then I laid my hand in Firm's; and he did not lift it to his lips, or sigh, but pressed it long and softly, and looked into my eyes without a word. And I knew that there would be none to love like them, wherever I might go.

But the last of all to say 'Good-bye' was my beloved Jowler. He jumped into the boat after me (for we were obliged to have a boat, the ship having laden further down), and he put his forepaws on my shoulders, and whined, and drooped his under-jaw. And when he looked at me, as he used, to know whether I was in fun or earnest, with more expression in his bright brown eyes than any human being has, I fell back under his weight and sobbed, and could not look at any one.

We had beautiful weather, and the view was glorious as we passed the Golden Gate, the entrance to what will one day be the capital of the world, perhaps. For, as our captain said, all power, and human energy, and strength are always going westward; and when they come here they must stop, or else they would be going eastward again, which they never yet have done. His argument may have been right or wrong—and indeed it must have been one or the other—but who could think of such things now, with a grander thing than human power —human love fading away behind? I could

not even bear to see the glorious mountains sinking, but ran below, and cried for hours, until all was dark and calm.

The reason for my sailing by this particular ship, and indeed rather suddenly, was that an old friend and Cornish cousin of Mr. Gundry, who had spent some years in California, was now returning to England by the *Bridal Veil*. This was Major Hockin, an officer of the British army, now on half-pay, and getting on in years. His wife was going home with him; for their children were married and settled in England, all but one now in San Francisco. And that one being well placed in the firm of Heniker, Banks, & Co., had obtained for his father and mother passage upon favourable terms, which was, as we say, ‘ an object to them.’

For the Major, though admirably connected (as his kinship to Colonel Gundry showed), and having a baronet not far off (if the twists of the world were set aside), also having served his country, and received a furrow on the top of his head, which made him brush his hair up, nevertheless, or all the more for that, was as

poor as a British officer must be, without official sesame. How he managed to feed and teach a large and not clever family, and train them all to fight their way in a battle worse than any of his own, and make gentlemen and ladies of them, whatever they did or wherever they went, he only knew, and his faithful wife, and the Lord, who helps brave poverty. Of such things he never spoke, unless his temper was aroused by luxury, and self-indulgence, and laziness.

But now he was a little better off, through having his children off his hands, and by means of a little property left him by a distant relative. He was on his way home to see to this; and a better man never returned to England, after always standing up for her.

Being a child in the ways of the world, and accustomed to large people, I could not make out Major Hockin at first, and thought him no more than a little man with many peculiarities. For he was not so tall as myself, until he put his high-heeled boots on, and he made such a stir about trifles at which Uncle Sam would have only grunted, that I took him to be nothing

more than a fidgety old campaigner. He wore a black-rimmed double eyeglass with blue side-lights at his temples, and his hat, from the shape of his forehead, hung back; he had narrow white wiry whiskers, and a Roman nose, and most prominent chin, and keen grey eyes with gingery brows, which contracted, like sharp little gables over them whenever anything displeased him. Rosy cheeks, tight-drawn, close-shaven, and gleaming with friction of yellow soap, added vigour to the general expression of his face, which was firm, and quick, and straightforward. The weather being warm and the tropics close at hand, Major Hockin was dressed in a fine suit of nankin, spruce and trim, and beautifully made, setting off his spare and active figure, which, though he was sixty-two years of age, seemed always to be ready for a game of leap-frog.

We were three days out of the Golden Gate, and the hills of the coast-ridge were faint and small, and the spires of the lower Nevada could only be caught when the hot haze lifted; and everybody lay about in our ship where it

seemed to afford the least smell and heat; and nobody for a moment dreamed—for we really all were dreaming—of anybody with energy enough to be disturbed about anything, when Major Hockin burst in upon us all (who were trying not to be red-hot in the feeble shade of poop-awnings), leading by the hand an ancient woman, scarcely dressed with decency, and howling in a tone very sad to hear.

'This lady has been robbed!' cried the Major; 'robbed, not fifteen feet below us. Robbed, ladies and gentlemen, of the most cherished treasures of her life, the portrait of her only son, the savings of a life of honest toil, her poor dead husband's tobacco-box, and a fine cut of Colorado cheese.'

'Ten pounds and a quarter, gospel-true!' cried the poor woman, wringing her hands, and searching for any kind face among us.

'Go to the Captain,' muttered one sleepy gentleman. 'Go to the devil,' said another sleepy man; 'what have we to do with it?'

'I will neither go to the Captain,' replied the Major, very distinctly, 'nor yet to the devil,

as a fellow who is not a man has dared to suggest to me——'

'All tied in my own pocket-handkerchief!' the poor old woman began to scream; 'the one with the three-cornered spots upon 'un. Only two have I ever owned in all my life, and this were the very best of 'em. Oh dear, oh dear, that ever I should come to this exposing of my things!'

'Madam, you shall have justice done, as sure as my name is Hockin. Gentlemen and ladies, if you are not all asleep, how would you like to be treated so? Because the weather is a trifle warm, there you lie like a parcel of Mexicans. If anybody picked your pockets, would you have life enough to roll over?'

'I don't think I should,' said a fat young Briton, with a very good-natured face; 'but for a poor woman I can stand upright. Major Hockin, here is a guinea for her. Perhaps more of us will give a trifle.'

'Well done!' cried the Major; 'but not so much as that. Let us first ascertain all the

rights of the case. Perhaps half-a-crown apiece would reach it.'

Half-a-crown apiece would have gone beyond it, as we discovered afterwards; for the old lady's handkerchief was in her box, lost under some more of her property; and the tide of sleepy charity taking this direction under such vehement impulse, several other steerage passengers lost their goods, but found themselves too late in doing so. But the Major was satisfied, and the rude man who had told him to go amiss begged his pardon, and thus we sailed on slowly and peaceably.

CHAPTER XIX.

INSIDE THE CHANNEL.

That little incident threw some light upon Major Hockin's character. It was not for himself alone that he was so particular, or, as many would call it, fidgety, to have everything done properly; for if anything came to his knowledge which he thought unfair to any one, it concerned him almost as much as if the wrong had been done to his own home self. Through this he had fallen into many troubles, for his impressions were not always accurate, but they taught him nothing; or rather, as his wife said, 'the Major could not help it.' The leading journals of the various places in which Major Hockin sojourned had published his letters of grievances sometimes, in the absence of the chief editor, and had suffered in purse by doing so. But the Major always said, 'Ventilate it,

ventilate the subject, my dear sir ; bring public opinion to bear on it.' And Mrs. Hockin always said that it was her husband to whom belonged the whole credit of this new and spirited use of the fine word 'ventilation.'

As betwixt this faithful pair, it is scarcely needful perhaps to say that the Major was the master. His sense of justice dictated that, as well as his general briskness. Though he was not at all like Mr. Gundry in undervaluing female mind, his larger experience and more frequent intercourse with our sex had taught him to do justice to us ; and it was pleasant to hear him often defer to the judgment of ladies. But this he did more perhaps in theory than in practice ; yet it made all the ladies declare to one another that he was a perfect gentleman. And so he was, though he had his faults ; but his faults were such as we approve of.

But Mrs. Hockin had no fault in any way worth speaking of. And whatever she had was her husband's doing, through her desire to keep up with him. She was pretty, even now in her sixtieth year, and a great deal prettier because

she never tried to look younger. Silver hair, and gentle eyes, and a forehead in which all the cares of eight children had scarcely imprinted a wrinkle, also a kind expression of interest in whatever was spoken of, with a quiet voice and smile, and a power of not saying too much at a time, combined to make this lady pleasant.

Without any fuss or declaration, she took me immediately under her care; and I doubt not that, after two years passed in the society of Suan Isco and the gentle Sawyer, she found many things in me to amend, which she did by example and without reproof. She shielded me also in the cleverest way from the curiosity of the saloon, which at first was very trying. For the *Bridal Veil* being a well-known ship both for swift passages and for equipment, almost every berth was taken, and when the weather was calm quite a large assembly sat down to dinner. Among these, of course, were some ill-bred people; and my youth and reserve, and self-consciousness, and so on, made my reluctant face the mark for many a long and searching gaze. My own wish had been not to

dine thus in public; but hearing that my absence would only afford fresh grounds for curiosity, I took my seat between the Major and his wife, the former having pledged himself to the latter to leave everything to her management. His temper was tried more than once to its utmost—which was not a very great distance—but he kept his word, and did not interfere; and I, having had some experience with Firm, eschewed all perception of glances. And as for all words, Mrs. Hockin met them with an obtuse obliqueness; so that after a day or two it was settled that nothing could be done about 'Miss Wood.'

It had been a very sore point to come to, and cost an unparalleled shed of pride, that I should be shorn of two-thirds of my name, and be called 'Miss Wood,' like almost anybody else. I refused to entertain such a very poor idea, and clung to the name which had always been mine—for my father would never depart from it—and I even burst into tears, which would, I suppose, be called 'sentimental;' but still the stern fact stared me in the face—I must

go as 'Miss Wood,' or not go at all. Upon this Major Hockin had insisted; and even Colonel Gundry could not move him from his resolution.

Uncle Sam had done his utmost, as was said before, to stop me from wishing to go at all; but when he found my whole heart bent upon it, and even my soul imperilled by the sense of neglecting life's chief duty, his own stern sense of right came in, and sided with my prayers to him. And so it was that he let me go, with pity for my youth and sex, but a knowledge that I was in good hands, and an inborn, perhaps 'Puritanical' faith that the Lord of all right would see to me.

The Major, on the other hand, had none of this. He differed from Uncle Sam as much as a trim-cut and highly-cultured garden-tree differs from a great spreading king of the woods. He was not without a strict sense of religion, especially when he had to march men to church; and he never even used a bad word, except when wicked facts compelled him. When properly let alone, and allowed to nurse his own opinions,

he had a respectable idea that all things were certain to be ordered for the best; but nothing enraged him so much as to tell him that, when things went against him, or even against his predictions.

It was lucky for me, then, that Major Hockin had taken a most adverse view of my case. He formed his opinions with the greatest haste, and with the greatest perseverance stuck to them; for he was the most generous of mankind, if generous means one quite full of his genus. And in my little case he had made up his mind that the whole of the facts were against me. 'Fact' was his favourite word, and one which he always used with great effect; for nobody knows very well what it means, as it does not belong to our language. And so when he said that the facts were against me, who was there to answer that facts are not truth?

This fast-set conclusion of his was known to me, not through himself, but through his wife. For I could not yet bring myself to speak of the things that lay close at my heart to him, though I knew that he must be aware of them. And he,

like a gentleman, left me to begin. I could often see that he was ready and quite eager to give me the benefit of his opinion, which would only have turned me against him and irritated him perhaps with me. And having no home in England, or indeed, I might say, anywhere, I was to live with the Major and his wife, supposing that they could arrange it so, until I should discover relatives.

We had a long and stormy voyage, although we set sail so fairly; and I thought that we never should round Cape Horn in the teeth of the furious north-east winds; and after that we lay becalmed, I have no idea in what latitude, though the passengers now talked quite like seamen, at least till the sea got up again. However, at last, we made the English Channel, in the dreary days of November, and after more peril there than anywhere else, we were safely docked at Southampton. Here the Major was met by two dutiful daughters, bringing their husbands and children, and I saw more of family-life (at a distance) than had fallen to my lot to observe before; and although there were many

little jars and brawls and cuts at one another, I was sadly inclined to wish sometimes for some brothers and sisters to quarrel with.

But having none to quarrel with, and none to love, except good Mrs. Hockin, who went away by train immediately, I spent such a wretched time in that town, that I longed to be back in the *Bridal Veil* in the very worst of weather. The ooze of the shore and the reek of the water, and the dreary flatness of the land around (after the glorious heaven-clad heights, which made me ashamed of littleness), also the rough stupid stare of the men, when I went about as an American lady may freely do in America, and the sharpness of everybody's voice (instead of the genial tones which those who cannot produce them call 'nasal,' but which from a higher view are cordial)—taken one after other, or all together, these things made me think, in the first flush of thought, that England was not a nice country. After a little while, I found that I had been a great deal too quick; as foreigners are with things which require quiet comprehension. For instance, I

was annoyed at having a stupid woman put over me, as if I could not mind myself—a cook, or a nurse, or housekeeper, or something very useful in the Hockin family, but to me a mere incumbrance, and (as I thought in my wrath sometimes) a spy. What was I likely to do, or what was any one likely to do to me, in a thoroughly civilised country, that I could not even stay in private lodgings, where I had a great deal to think of, without this dull creature being forced upon me? But the Major so ordered it, and I gave in.

There I must have stayed for the slowest three months ever passed without slow starvation, finishing my growth, but not knowing how to 'form my mind,' as I was told to do. Major Hockin came down, once or twice, to see me; and though I did not like him yet, it was almost enough to make me do so to see a little liveliness. But I could not and would not put up with a frightful German Baron of music, with a polished card like a toast-rack, whom the Major tried to impress on me. As if I could stop to take music lessons!

'Miss Wood,' said Major Hockin, in his strongest manner, the last time he came to see me: 'I stand to you *in loco parentis*. That means with the duties, relationships, responsibilities, and what not, of the unfortunate—I should say rather of the beloved—parent deceased. I wish to be more careful of you than of a daughter of my own. A great deal more careful, ten times, Miss Wood. I may say a thousand times more careful, because you have not had the discipline which a daughter of mine would have enjoyed. And you are so impulsive, when you take an idea. You judge everybody by your likings. That leads to error, error, error.'

'My name is not Miss Wood,' I answered; 'my name is "Erema Castlewood." Whatever need may have been on board ship for nobody knowing who I am, surely I may have my own name now.'

When anybody says 'surely,' at once up springs a question; nothing being sure, and the word itself at heart quite interrogative. The Major knew all those little things, which

manage women so manfully. So he took me by the hand, and led me to the light, and looked at me.

I had not one atom of Russian twist or dyed China-grass in my hair, or even the ubiquitous aid of horse and cow; neither in my face or figure was I conscious of false presentment. The Major was welcome to lead me to the light and to throw up all his spectacles, and gaze with all his eyes. My only vexation was with myself, because I could not keep the weakness—which a stranger should not see—out of my eyes; upon sudden remembrance, who it was that used to have the right to do such things to me. This it was, and nothing else, that made me drop my eyes perhaps.

'There, there, my dear!' said Major Hockin, in a softer voice than usual; 'pretty fit you are to combat with the world, and defy the world, and brave the world, and abolish the world—or at least the world's opinion! "Bo to a goose" you can say, my dear; but no "bo" to a gander. No, no, do quietly what I advise—by-the-by, you have never asked my advice!'

I cannot have been hypocritical; for of all things I detest that most; but in good faith I said, being conquered by the Major's relaxation of his eyes—

'Oh, why have you never offered it to me? You know that I never could ask for it.'

For the moment he looked surprised, as if our ideas had gone crosswise; and then he remembered many little symptoms of my faith in his opinions; which was now growing inevitable, with his wife and daughters, and many grandchildren—all certain that he was a Solomon.

'Erema,' he said, 'you are a dear, good girl, though sadly, sadly romantic. I had no idea that you had so much sense. I will talk with you Erema when we both have leisure.'

'I am quite at leisure, Major Hockin,' I replied, 'and only too happy to listen to you.'

'Yes, yes. I dare say. You are in lodgings. You can do exactly as you please. But I have a basin of ox-tail soup, a cutlet, and a woodcock waiting for me, at the Cosmopolitan Hotel. Bless me, I am five minutes late already! I will come and have a talk with you afterwards.'

'Thank you,' I said, 'we had better leave it. It seems of no importance compared—compared with——'

'My dinner!' said the Major; but he was offended, and so was I a little, though neither of us meant to vex the other.

CHAPTER XX.

BRUNTSEA.

It would be unfair to Major Hockin to take him for an extravagant man or a self-indulgent one, because of the good dinner he had ordered, and his eagerness to sit down to it. Through all the best years of his life he had been most frugal, abstemious, and self-denying, grudging every penny of his own expense, but sparing none for his family. And now, when he found himself so much better off, with more income and less outlay, he could not be blamed for enjoying good things with the wholesome zest of abstinence.

For, coming to the point, and going well into the matter, the Major had discovered that the 'little property' left to him, and which he was come to see to, really was quite a fine estate for anyone who knew how to manage it, and

would not spare courage and diligence. And of these two qualities he had such abundance that without any outlet they might have turned him sour.

The property lately devised to him by his cousin, Sir Rufus Hockin, had long been far more plague than profit to that idle baronet. Sir Rufus hated all exertion, yet could not comfortably put up with the only alternative—extortion. Having no knowledge of his cousin Nick (except that he was indefatigable), and knowing his own son to be lazier even than himself had been, longing also to inflict even posthumous justice upon the land agent, with the glad consent of his heir he left this distant, fretful, and naked spur of land to his beloved cousin, Major Nicholas Hockin.

The Major first heard of this unexpected increase of his belongings while he was hovering, in the land of gold, between his desire to speculate and his dread of speculation. At once he consulted our Colonel Gundry, who met him by appointment at Sacramento; and Uncle Sam having a vast idea of the value of land in Eng-

land, which the Major naturally made the most of, now being an English landowner, they spent a most pleasant evening, and agreed upon the line marked out by Providence.

Thus it was that he came home, bringing (by kind arrangement) me, who was much more trouble than comfort to him, and at first disposed to be cold and curt. And thus it was that I was left so long in that wretched Southampton, under the care of a very kind person who never could understand me. And all this while (as I ought to have known, without any one to tell me) Major Hockin was testing the value and beating the bounds of his new estate, and prolonging his dinner from one to two courses, or three if he had been travelling. His property was large enough to afford him many dinners, and rich enough (when rightly treated) to insure their quality.

Bruntsea is a quiet little village on the south-east coast of England, in Kent or in Sussex, I am not sure which; for it has a constitution of its own, and says that it belongs to neither. It used to be a place of size and valour, furnishing

ships and finding money for patriotic purposes. And great people both embarked and landed, one doing this and the other that, though nobody seems to have ever done both, if history is to be relied upon. The glory of the place is still preserved in a seal and an immemorial stick, each of which is blest with marks as incomprehensible as could be wished, though both are to be seen for sixpence. The name of the place is written in more than forty different ways, they say; and the oldest inhabitant is less positive than the youngest how to spell it.

This village lies in the mouth, or rather at the eastern end of the mouth, of a long and wide depression among the hills, through which a sluggish river wins its muddy consummation. This river once went far along the sea-brink, without entering (like a child who is afraid to bathe), as the Adur does at Shoreham, and as many other rivers do. And in those days the mouth and harbour were under the cliff at Bruntsea; whence its seal and corporation, stick, and other blessings. But three or four centuries ago the river was drawn by a violent storm, like

a badger from his barrel, and forced to come straight out and face the sea, without any three miles of dalliance. The time-serving water made the best of this, forsook its ancient bed (as classic nymphs and fountains used to do), and left poor Bruntsea with a dry bank, and no haven for a cockle-shell. A new port, such as it is, encrusted the fickle jaw of the river; piles were driven and earthworks formed, lest the water should return to its old love, and Bruntsea, as concerned her traffic, became but a mark of memory. Her noble corporation never demanded their old channel, but regarded the whole as the will of the Lord, and had the good sense to insist upon nothing, except their time-honoured ceremonies.

In spite of all these and their importance, land became of no value there. The owner of the Eastern Manor and of many ancient rights, having no means of getting at them, sold them for an 'old song,' which they were; and the buyer was one of the Hockin race, a shipwrecked mariner from Cornwall, who had been kindly treated there, and took a fancy accordingly. He

sold his share in some mine to pay for it, settled here, and died here; and his son, getting on in the world, built a house, and took to serious smuggling. In the chalk cliffs eastward he found holes of honest value to him, capable of cheap enlargement (which the Cornish holes were not), and much more accessible from France. Becoming a magistrate and deputy-lieutenant, he had the duty and privilege of inquiring into his own deeds, which enabled him to check those few who otherwise might have competed with him. He flourished, and bought more secure estates; and his son, for activity against smugglers, was made a gentle baronet.

These things now had passed away, and the first fee-simple of the Hockin family became a mere load and incumbrance. Sir George, and Sir Robert, and Sir Rufus, one after another, did not like the hints about contraband dealings which met them whenever they deigned to come down there, till at last the estate (being left to an agent) cost a great deal more than he ever paid in. And thus—as should have been more briefly told—the owner was our Major Hockin.

No wonder that this gentleman, with so many cares to attend to, had no time, at first, to send for me. And no wonder that when he came down to see me, he was obliged to have good dinners. For the work done by him in those three months surprised everybody except himself, and made in old Bruntsea a stir unknown since the time of the Spanish Armada. For he owned the house under the eastern cliff, and the warren, and the dairy farm inland, and the slope of the ground where the sea used to come, and the fields where the people grew potatoes gratis, and all the eastern village, where the tenants paid their rents whenever they found it rational.

A hot young man, in a place like this, would have done a great deal of mischief. Either he would have accepted large views, and applauded this fine communism (if he could afford it, and had no wife), or else he would have rushed at everybody headlong, and butted them back to their abutments. Neither course would have created half the excitement which the Major's did. At least, there might have been more talk

at first, but not a quarter so much in sum total. Of those things, however, there is time enough to speak, if I dare to say anything about them.

The things more to my mind (and therefore more likely to be made plain to another mind) are not the petty flickering phantoms of the shadow we call human, and which alone we realise, and dwell inside it and upon it as if it were all creation; but the infinitely nobler things of ever-changing but perpetual beauty, and no selfishness. These, without deigning to us even sense to be aware of them, shape our little minds and bodies, and our large self-importance, and fail to know when the lord or King who owns, is buried under them. To have perception of such mighty truths is good for all of us; and I never had keener perception of them than when I sat down on the Major's camp-stool, and saw all his land around me, and even the sea—where all the fish were his, as soon as he could catch them—and largely reflected that not a square foot of the whole world would ever belong to me.

'Bruntlands,' as the house was called, perhaps from standing well above the sea,

was sheltered by the curve of the eastern cliff, which looked down over Bruntsea. The cliff was of chalk, very steep towards the sea, and showing a prominent headland towards the south, but prettily rising in grassy curves from the inland and from the westward. And then, where it suddenly chined away from land-slope into sea-front, a long bar of shingle began at right angles to it, and, as level as a railroad, went to the river's mouth, a league or so now to the westward. And beyond that another line of white cliffs rose, and looked well till they came to their headland. Inside this bank of shingle, from end to end, might be traced the old course of the river, and to landward of that trough at the hither end stood, or lay, the calm old village.

Forsaken as it was by the river, this village stuck to its ancient site and home, and instead of migrating contracted itself, and cast off needless members. Shrunken Bruntsea clung about the oldest of its churches, while the four others fell to rack and ruin, and settled into cow-yards and barns, and places where old men might sit

and sigh. But Bruntsea distinctly and trenchantly kept the old town's division into east and west.

East Bruntsea was wholly in the Major's manor, which had a special charter; and most of the houses belonged to him. This ownership hitherto had meant only that the landlord should do all the tumbledown repairs (when the agent reported that they must be done), but never must enter the door for his rent. The borough had been disfranchised, though the snuggest of the snug for generations; and the freemen, thus being robbed of their rights, had no power to discharge their duties. And to complicate matters yet further, for the few who wished to simplify them, the custom of 'borough-English' prevailed, and governed the descent of dilapidations, making nice niceties for clever men of law.

'You see a fine property here, Miss Wood,' Major Hockin said to me, as we sat, on the day after I was allowed to come, enjoying the fresh breeze from the sea and the newness of the February air, and looking abroad very generally; 'a very fine property, but neglected—shame-

fully, horribly, atrociously—neglected, but capable of noble things, of grand things, of magnificent, with a trifle of judicious outlay!'

'Oh, please not to talk of outlay, my dear,' said good Mrs. Hockin, gently; 'it is such an odious word; and where in the world is it to come from?'

'Leave that to me. When I was a boy, my favourite copy in my copy-book was, "Where there's a will there's a way." Miss Wood, what is your opinion? But, wait, you must have time to understand the subject. First we bring a railway—always the first step; why, the line is already made for it, by the course of the old river, and the distance from Newport three miles and a half. It ought not to cost quite 200*l.* a mile, the mere outlay for rails and sleepers. The land is all mine, and—and of course other landed proprietors'. Very well, these would all unite, of course; so that not a farthing need be paid for land, which is the best half of the battle. We have the station here—not too near my house, that would never do—I could not bear the noise—but in a fine

central place where nobody on earth could object to it—lively, and close at hand for all of them. Unluckily I was just too late. We have lost a parliamentary year through that execrable calm—you remember all about it. Otherwise we would have had Billy Puff stabled at Bruntsea by the first of May. But never mind; we shall do it all the better and cheaper by taking our time about it. Very well, we have the railway opened, and the trade of the place developed. We build a fine terrace of elegant villas, a crescent also, and a large hotel replete with every luxury; and we form the finest sea parade in England by simply assisting nature. Half London comes down here to bathe, to catch shrimps, to flirt, and to do all the rest of it. We become a select, salubrious, influential, and yet economical place; and then what do we do, Mrs Hockin?'

'My dear, how can I tell? But I hope that we should rest and be thankful.'

'Not a bit of it. I should hope not, indeed. Erema, what do we do then?'

'It is useless to ask me. Well, then, perhaps you set up a handsome sawmill?'

'A sawmill! What a notion of Paradise! No, this is what we do—but remember that I speak in the strictest confidence; dishonest antagonism might arise, if we ventilated our ideas too soon—Mrs. Hockin and Miss Wood, we demand the restoration of our river!—the return of our river to its ancient course.'

'I see,' said his wife; 'oh, how grand that would be; and how beautiful from our windows! That, really, now, is a noble thought!'

'A just one—simply a just one. Justice ought not to be noble, my dear, however rare it may be. Generosity, magnanimity, heroism, and so on—those are the things we call noble, my dear.'

'And the founding of cities. Oh, my dear, I remember, when I was at school, it was always said, in what we called our histories, that the founders of cities had honours paid them, and altars built, and divinities done, and holidays held in their honour.'

'To that I object,' cried the Major, sternly. 'If I founded fifty cities, I would never allow

one holiday. The Sabbath is enough: one day in seven—fifteen per cent. of one's whole time; and twenty per cent. of your Sunday goes in church. Very right, of course, and loyal, and truly edifying—Mrs. Hockin's father was a clergyman, Miss Wood; and the last thing I would ever allow on my manor would be a dissenting chapel; but still I will have no new churches here, and a man who might go against me. They all want to pick their own religious views, instead of reflecting who supports them! It never used to be so, and such things shall never occur on my manor. A good hotel, attendance included, and a sound and moderate table d'hôte; but no church with a Popish bag sent round, and money to pay, without anything to eat.'

'My dear, my dear,' cried Mrs. Hockin, 'I never like you to talk like that. You quite forget who my father was, and your own second son such a very sound priest.'

'A priest! don't let him come here,' cried the Major; 'or I'll let him know what tonsure is, and read him the order of Melchisedec. A

priest! After going round the world three times, to come home and be hailed as the father of a priest! Don't let him come near me, or I'll sacrifice him.'

'Now, Major, you are very proud of him,' his good wife answered, as he shook his stick. 'How could he help taking orders when he was under orders to do so? And his views are sound to the last degree, most strictly correct and practical—at least, except as to celibacy.'

'He holds that his own mother ought never to have been born! Miss Wood, do you call that practical?'

'I have no acquaintance with such things,' I replied; 'we had none of them in California. But is it practical, Major Hockin—of course you know best in your engineering—I mean, would it not require something like a tunnel for the river and the railway to run on the same ground?'

'Why, bless me! That seems to have escaped my notice. You have not been with old Uncle Sam for nothing. We shall have to appoint you our chief engineer.'

CHAPTER XXI.

LISTLESS.

It seemed an unfortunate thing for me, and unfavourable to my purpose, that my host, and even my hostess too, should be so engrossed with their new estate, its beauties and capabilities. Mrs. Hockin devoted herself at once to fowls and pigs and the like extravagant economies, having bought, at some ill-starred moment, a book which proved that hens ought to lay eggs in a manner to support themselves, their families, and the family they belong to, at the price of one penny a dozen. Eggs being two shillings a dozen in Bruntsea, here was a margin for profit—no less than two thousand per cent. to be made, allowing for all accidents. The lady also found another book, divulging for a shilling the author's purely invaluable secret—how to work an acre of ground, pay

house rent, supply the house grandly, and give away a barrow-load of vegetables every day to the poor of the parish, by keeping a pig—if that pig were kept properly. And after that, pork, and ham, and bacon came of him; while another golden pig went on.

Mrs. Hockin was very soft-hearted, and said that she never could make bacon of a pig like that; and I answered that if she ever got him it would be unwise to do so. However, the law was laid down in both books, that golden fowls and diamondic pigs must die the death before they begin to over-eat production; and the Major said, 'To be sure. Yes, yes. Let them come to good meat, and then off with their heads.' And his wife said that she was sure she could do it. When it comes to a question of tare and tret, false sentiment must be excluded.

At the moment these things went by me as trifles, yet made me more impatient. Being older now, and beholding what happens with tolerance and complaisance, I am only surprised that my good friends were so tolerant of me

and so complacent. For I must have been a great annoyance to them, with my hurry and my one idea. Happily, they made allowance for me, which I was not old enough to make for them.

'Go to London, indeed! Go to London by yourself!' cried the Major, with a red face, and his glasses up, when I told him one morning that I could stop no longer without doing something. 'Mary, my dear, when you have done out there, will you come in and reason—if you can—with Miss Wood? She vows that she is going to London, all alone.'

'Oh, Major Hockin—oh, Nicholas, dear, such a thing has happened!' Mrs. Hockin had scarcely any breath to tell us, as she came in through the window. 'You know that they have only had three bushels, or, at any rate, not more than five, almost ever since they came. Erema, you know as well as I do.'

'Seven and three-quarter bushels of barley, at five and ninepence a bushel, Mary,' said the Major, pulling out a pocket-book; 'besides Indian corn, chopped meat, and potatoes!'

'And fourteen pounds of paddy,' I said, which was a paltry thing of me; 'not to mention a cake of graves, three sacks of brewers' grains, and then—I forget what next.'

'You are too bad, all of you. Erema, I never thought you would turn against me so. And you made me get nearly all of it. But please to look here. What do you call this? Is this no reward? Is this not enough? Major, if you please, what do you call this? What a pity you have had your breakfast!'

'A blessing—if this was to be my breakfast. I call that, my dear, the very smallest egg I have seen since I took sparrows' nests. No wonder they sell them at twelve a penny. I congratulate you upon your first egg, my dear Mary.'

'Well, I don't care,' replied Mrs. Hockin, who had the sweetest temper in the world. 'Small beginnings make large endings; and an egg must be always small at one end. You scorn my first egg, and Erema should have had it, if she had been good. But she was very wicked, and I know not what to do with it.'

'Blow it!' cried the Major. 'I mean no harm, ladies. I never use low language. What I mean is, make a pin hole at each end, give a puff, and away goes two pennyworth, and you have a cabinet specimen, which your egg is quite fitted by its cost to be. But now, Mary, talk to Miss Wood, if you please. It is useless for me to say anything, and I have three appointments in the town'—he always called it 'the town' now—'three appointments, if not four; yes, I may certainly say four. Talk to Miss Wood, my dear, if you please. She wants to go to London, which would be absurd. Ladies seem to enter into ladies' logic. They seem to be able to appreciate it better, to see all the turns and the ins and outs, which no man has intellect enough to see, or at least to make head or tail of. Good-by for the present; I had better be off.'

'I should think you had,' exclaimed Mrs. Hockin, as her husband marched off, with his side-lights on, and his short, quick step, and well-satisfied glance at the hill which belonged to him, and the beach, over which he had rights

of plunder—or, at least, Uncle Sam would have called them so, strictly as he stood up for his own.

'Now come and talk quietly to me, my dear,' Mrs. Hockin began, most kindly, forgetting all the marvel of her first-born egg. 'I have noticed how restless you are, and devoid of all healthy interest in anything. "Listless" is the word. "Listless" is exactly what I mean, Erema. When I was at your time of life, I could never have gone about caring for nothing. I wonder that you knew that I even had a fowl; much more how much they had eaten!'

'I really do try to do all I can, and that is a proof of it,' I said. 'I am not quite so listless as you think. But those things do seem so little to me.'

'My dear, if you were happy, they would seem quite large, as, after all the anxieties of my life, I am able now to think them. It is a power to be thankful for; or, at least, I often think so. Look at my husband! He has outlived and outlasted more trouble than anyone

but myself could reckon up to him; and yet he is as brisk, as full of life, as ready to begin a new thing to-morrow—when at our age there may be no to-morrow, except in that better world, my dear, of which it is high time for him and me to think; as I truly hope we may spare the time to do.'

'Oh, don't talk like that,' I cried. 'Please, Mrs. Hockin, to think of your hens and chicks—at least there will be chicks by and by. I am almost sure there will, if you only persevere. It seems unfair to set our minds on any other world, till justice has been done in this.'

'You are very young, my child, or you would know that in that case we never should think of it at all. But I don't want to preach you a sermon, Erema, even if I could do so. I only just want you to tell me what you think, what good you imagine that you can do.'

'It is no imagination. I am sure that I can right my father's wrongs. And I never shall rest till I do so.'

'Are you sure that there is any wrong to

right?' she asked in the warmth of the moment, and then, seeing perhaps how my colour changed, she looked at me sadly, and kissed my forehead.

'Oh, if you had only once seen him,' I said; 'without any exaggeration, you would have been satisfied at once. That he could ever have done any harm was impossible, utterly impossible. I am not as I was. I can listen to almost anything now quite calmly. But never let me hear such a wicked thing again.'

'You must not go on like that, Erema, unless you wish to lose all your friends. No one can help being sorry for you. Very few girls have been placed as you are. I am sure, when I think of my own daughters, I can never be too thankful. But the very first thing you have to learn, above all things, is to control yourself.'

'I know it—I know it, of course,' I said; 'and I keep on trying my very best. I am thoroughly ashamed of what I said, and I hope you will try to forgive me.'

'A very slight exertion is enough for that. But now, my dear, what I want to know is this—and you will excuse me if I ask too much. What good do you expect to get by going thus to London? Have you any friend there, anybody to trust, anything settled as to what you are to do?'

'Yes, everything is settled in my own mind,' I answered very bravely; 'I have the address of a very good woman, found among my father's papers, who nursed his children, and understood his nature, and always kept her faith in him. There must be a great many more who do the same, and she will be sure to know them and introduce me to them, and I shall be guided by their advice.'

'But suppose that this excellent woman is dead, or not to be found, or has changed her opinion.'

'Her opinion she never could change. But if she is not to be found, I shall find her husband, or her children, or somebody. And besides that, I have a hundred things to do. I have the address of the agent through whom

my father drew his income, though Uncle Sam let me know as little as he could. And I know who his bankers were (when he had a bank), and he may have left important papers there.'

'Come, that looks a little more sensible, my dear; bankers may always be relied upon. And there may be some valuable plate, Erema. But why not let the Major go with you? His advice is so invaluable.'

'I know that it is, in all ordinary things. But I cannot have him now for a very simple reason. He has made up his mind about my dear father—horribly, horribly; I can't speak of it. And he never changes his mind; and sometimes when I look at him, I hate him.'

'Erema, you are quite a violent girl, although you so seldom show it. Is the whole world divided then into two camps—those who think as you wish, and those who are led by their judgment to think otherwise? And are you to hate all who do not think as you wish?'

'No, because I do not hate you,' I said; 'I love you, though you do not think as I wish. But that is only because you think your hus-

band must be right, of course. But I cannot like those who have made up their minds, according to their own coldness.'

'Major Hockin is not cold at all. On the contrary, he is a warm-hearted man—I might almost say hot-hearted.'

'Yes, I know he is. And that makes it ten times worse. He takes up everybody's case—but mine.'

'Sad as it is, you almost make me smile,' my hostess answered gravely; 'and yet it must be very bitter for you, knowing how just and kind my husband is. I am sure that you will give him credit for at least desiring to take your part. And doing so, at least you might let him go with you, if only as a good protection.'

'I have no fear of any one; and I might take him into society that he would not like. In a good cause he would go anywhere, I know. But in my cause, of course, he would be scrupulous. Your kindness I always can rely upon, and I hope in the end to earn his as well.'

'My dear, he has never been unkind to you. I am certain that you never can say that

of him. Major Hockin unkind to a poor girl like you!'

'The last thing I wish to claim is anybody's pity,' I answered, less humbly than I should have spoken, though the pride was only in my tone perhaps. 'If people choose to pity me, they are very good, and I am not at all offended, because—because they cannot help it perhaps, from not knowing anything about me. I have nothing whatever to be pitied for, except that I have lost my father, and have nobody left to care for me, except Uncle Sam in America.'

'Your Uncle Sam, as you call him, seems to be a very wonderful man, Erema,' said Mrs. Hockin, craftily, so far as there could be any craft in her; 'I never saw him—a great loss on my part. But the Major went up to meet him somewhere, and came home with the stock of his best tie broken, and two buttons gone from his waistcoat. Does Uncle Sam make people laugh so much? Or is it that he has some extraordinary gift of inducing people to taste whisky? My husband is a very—most abstemious man, as you must be well aware,

Miss Wood, or we never should have been as we are, I am sure. But, for the first time in all my life, I doubted his discretion, on the following day, when he had—what shall I say? —when he had been exchanging sentiments with Uncle Sam!'

'Uncle Sam never takes too much in any way,' I replied to this new attack; 'he knows what he ought to take, and then he stops. Do you think that it may have been his "sentiments," perhaps, that were too strong and large for the Major?'

'Erema!' cried Mrs. Hockin, with amazement, as if I had no right to think or express my thoughts in life so early; 'if you can talk politics at eighteen, you are quite fit to go anywhere. I have heard a great deal of American ladies, and seen not a little of them, as you know. But I thought that you called yourself an English girl, and insisted particularly upon it.'

'Yes, that I do; and I have good reason. I am born of an old English family, and I hope to be no disgrace to it. But being brought up in a number of ways, as I have been without

thinking of it, and being quite different from the fashionable girls Major Hockin likes to walk with——'

'My dear, he never walks with anybody but myself!'

'Oh yes, I remember! I was thinking of the deck. There are no fashionable girls here yet. Till the terrace is built, and the esplanade——'

'There shall be neither terrace nor esplanade, if the Major is to do such things upon them.'

'I am sure that he never would,' I replied; 'it was only their dresses that he liked at all, and that very, to my mind, extraordinary style, as well as unbecoming. You know what I mean, Mrs. Hockin, that wonderful—what shall I call it?—way of looping up?'

'Call me "Aunt Mary," my dear, as you did when the waves were so dreadful. You mean that hideous Mexican poncho, as they called it, stuck up here and going down there. Erema, what observation you have! Nothing ever seems to escape you. Did you ever see anything so indecorous?'

'It made me feel just as if I ought not to look at them,' I answered, with perfect truth, for so it did; 'I have never been accustomed to such things. But seeing how the Major approved of them, and liked to be walking up and down between them, I knew that they must be not only decorous, but attractive. There is no appeal from his judgment, is there?'

'I agree with him upon every point, my dear child; but I have always longed to say a few words about that. For I cannot help thinking that he went too far.'

CHAPTER XXII.

BETSY BOWEN.

So far, then, there was nobody found to go into my case, and to think with me, and to give me friendly countenance, with the exception of Firm Gundry. And I feared that he tried to think with me because of his faithful and manly love, more than from balance of evidence. The Sawyer, of course, held my father guiltless, through his own fidelity and simple ways; but he could not enter into my set thought of a stern duty laid upon me, because to his mind the opinion of the world mattered nothing so long as a man did aright. For wisdom like this, if wisdom it is, I was a great deal too young and ardent; and to me fair fame was of almost equal value with clear conscience. And therefore, wise or foolish, rich or poor, beloved or unloved, I must be listless about

other things, and restless in all, until I should establish truth and justice.

However, I did my best to be neither ungrateful nor stupidly obstinate, and, beginning more and more to allow for honest though hateful opinions, I yielded to dear Mrs. Hockin's wish that I should not do anything out of keeping with English ideas and habits. In a word, I accepted the Major's kind offer to see me quite safe in good hands in London, or else bring me straightway back again. And I took only just things enough for a day or two, meaning to come back by the end of the week. And I kissed Mrs. Hockin just enough for that.

It would not be a new thing for me to say that 'we never know what is going to happen,' but new or stale it was true enough, as old common sayings of common sense (though spurned when not wanted) show themselves. At first, indeed, it seemed as if I were come for nothing, at least as concerned what I thought the chief business of my journey. The Major had wished to go first to the bank, and ap-

peared to think nothing of anything else; but I, on the other hand, did not want him there, preferring to keep him out of my money matters, and so he was obliged to let me have my way.

I always am sorry when I have been perverse, and it seemed to serve me right for wilfulness when no Betsy Bowen could be discovered either at the place which we tried first, or that to which we were sent thence. Major Hockin looked at me till I could have cried, as much as to hint that the whole of my story was all of a piece, all a wild-goose chase. And being more curious than ever now to go to the bank and ransack, he actually called out to the cabman to drive without delay to Messrs. Shovelin, Wayte, and Shovelin. But I begged him to allow me just one minute while I spoke to the servant-maid alone. Then I showed her a sovereign, at which she opened her mouth in more ways than one, for she told me that 'though she had faithfully promised to say nothing about it, because of a dreadful quarrel between her mistress and Mrs. Strouss that was

now, and a jealousy between them that was quite beyond belief, she could not refuse such a nice young lady, if I would promise faithfully not to tell.' This promise I gave with fidelity, and returning to the cabman, directed him to drive not to Messrs. Shovelin, Wayte, and Shovelin just yet, but to No. 17 European Square, St. Katherine's.

From a maze of streets and rugged corners, and ins and outs nearly as crooked as those of a narrow human nature, we turned at last into European Square, which was no square at all, but an oblong opening pitched with rough granite, and distinguished with a pump. There were great thoroughfares within a hundred yards, but the place itself seemed unnaturally quiet upon turning suddenly into it, only murmurous with distant London din, as the spires of a shell hold the heavings of the sea. After driving three or four times round the pump, for the houses were numbered anyhow, we found No. 17, and I jumped out.

'Now don't be in such a fierce hurry, Miss Wood,' cried the Major, who was now a little

crusty; 'English ladies allow themselves to be handed out, without hurrying the gentlemen who have the honour.'

'But I wanted to save you the honour,' I said; 'I will come back immediately, if you will kindly wait.' And with this I ran up the old steps, and rang and knocked, while several bearded faces came and gazed through dingy windows.

'Can I see Mrs. Strouss?' I asked, when a queer old man in faded brown livery came to the door with a candle in his hand, though the sun was shining.

'I am the Meesther Strouss; when you see me you behold the good Meeses Strouss also.'

'Thank you, but that will not do,' I replied; 'my business is with Mrs. Strouss alone.'

He did not seem to like this at first sight, but politely put the chainbolt on the door while he retired to take advice; and the Major looked out of the cab and laughed.

'You had better come back while you can,' he said, 'though they seem in no hurry to swallow you.'

This was intended to vex me, and I did not even turn my head to him. The house looked very respectable, and there were railings to the area.

'The house is very respectable,' continued Major Hockin, who always seemed to know what I was thinking of, and now in his quick manner ran up the steps; 'just look, the scraper is clean. You never see that, or at least not often, except with respectable people, Erema.'

'Pray, what would my scraper be? and who is Erema?' cried a strong clear voice, as the chain of the door was set free, and a stout tall woman with a flush in her cheeks confronted us. 'I never knew more than one Erema—good mercy!'

My eyes met hers, and she turned as pale as death, and fell back into a lobby-chair. She knew me by my likeness to my father, falling on the memories started by my name; and, strong as she was, the surprise overcame her, at the sound of which up rushed the small Herr Strouss.

'What are you doing dere, all of you? vhat have you enterprised with my frau? Explain, Vilhelmina, or I call the policemans, vhat I should say de peelers.'

'Stop!' cried the Major, and he stopped at once, not for the word, which would have had no power, although I knew nothing about it then, but because he had received a sign which assured him that here was a brother Mason. In a moment the infuriated husband vanished into the rational and docile brother.

'Ladies and gentlemans, valk in, if you please,' he said to my great astonishment; 'Vilhelmina and my good self make you velcome to our poor house. Vilhelmina, arise and say so.'

'Go to the back kitchen, Hans,' replied Wilhelmina, whose name was 'Betsy,' 'and don't come out until I tell you. You will find work to do there, and remember to pump up. I wish to hear things that you are not to hear, mind you. Shut yourself in, and if you soap the door to deceive me I shall know it.'

'Vere goot, vere goot,' said the philosophical

German; 'I never meddle with nothing, Vilhelmina, no more than vhat I do for de money and de house.'

Betsy, however, was not quite so sure of that. With no more ceremony she locked him in, and then came back to us, who could not make things out.

'My husband is the bravest of the brave,' she told us, while she put down his key on the table, 'and a nobler man never lived, I am sure of that. But every one of them foreigners—excuse me, sir, you are an Englishman?'

'I am,' replied the Major, pulling up his little whiskers; 'I am so, madam, and nothing you can say will in any way hurt my feelings. I am above nationalities.'

'Just so, sir; then you will feel with me when I say that they foreigners is dreadful. Oh, the day that I ever married one of 'em—but there, I ought to be ashamed of myself, and my lord's daughter facing me.'

'Do you know me?' I asked, with hot colour in my face, and my eyes, I dare say, glistening; 'are you sure that you know me? And then please to tell me how.'

As I spoke I was taking off the close silk bonnet which I had worn for travelling, and my hair, having caught in a pin, fell round me, and before I could put it up, or even think of it, I lay in the great arms of Betsy Bowen, as I used to lie when I was a little baby, and when my father was in his own land, with a home and wife and seven little ones. And to think of this made me keep her company in crying, and it was some time before we did anything else.

'Well, well,' said the Major, who detested scenes, except when he had made them; 'I shall be off. You are in good hands; and the cabman pulled out his watch when we stopped. So did I. But he is sure to beat me. They draw the minute hand on with a magnet, I am told, while the watch hangs on their badge, and they can swear they never opened it. Wonderful age, very wonderful age, since the time when you and I were young, ma'am.'

'Yes, sir, to be sure, sir!' Mrs. Strouss replied, as she wiped her eyes to speak of things; 'but the most wonderfullest of all

things, don't you think, is the going of the time, sir? No cabby can make it go faster while he waits, or slower while he is a-driving, than the minds inside of us manage it. Why, sir, it were only like yesterday that this here tall, elegant, royal young lady was a-lying on my breast, and what a hand she was to kick! And I said that her hair was sure to grow like this. If I was to tell you only half what comes across me——'

'If you did, ma'am, the cabman would make his fortune, and I should lose mine, which is more than I can afford. Erema, after dinner I shall look you up. I know a good woman when I see her, Mrs. Strouss, which does not happen every day. I can trust Miss Castlewood with you. Good-bye, good-bye for the present.'

It was the first time he had ever called me by my proper name, and that made me all the more pleased with it.

'You see, sir, why I were obliged to lock him in,' cried the 'good woman,' following to the door, to clear every blur from her virtues; 'for his own sake I done it, for I felt my cry a-coming, and to see me cry—Lord bless you,

the effect upon him is to call out for a walking-stick and a pint of beer.'

'All right, ma'am, all right!' the Major answered in a tone which appeared to me unfeeling; 'cabman, are you asleep there? Bring the lady's bag this moment.'

As the cab disappeared without my even knowing where to find that good protector again in this vast maze of millions, I could not help letting a little cold fear encroach on the warmth of my outburst. I had heard so much in America of the dark, subtle places of London, and the wicked things that happen all along the Thames, discovered or invented by great writers of their own, that the neighbourhood of the docks and the thought of rats (to which I could never grow accustomed) made me look, with a flash perhaps of doubt, at my new old friend.

'You are not sure of me, Miss Erema,' said Mrs. Strouss, without taking offence; 'after all that has happened, who can blame it on you? But your father was not so suspicious, miss. It might have been better for him if he

had, according, leastways, to my belief, which a team of wild horses will never drag out.'

'Oh, only let me hear you talk of that!' I exclaimed, forgetting all other things; 'you know more about it than anybody I have ever met with, except my own father, who would never tell a word.'

'And quite right he was, miss, according to his views. But come to my little room, unless you are afraid. I can tell you some things that your father never knew.'

'Afraid! do you think I am a baby still? But I cannot bear that Mr. Strouss should be locked up on my account.'

'Then he shall come out,' said Mrs. Strouss, looking at me very pleasantly; 'that was just like your father, Miss Erema. But I fall into the foreign ways, being so much with the foreigners.' Whether she thought it the custom among 'foreigners' for wives to lock their husbands in back kitchens was more than she ever took the trouble to explain. But she walked away in her stout, firm manner, and presently returned with Mr. Strouss, who seemed to be

quite contented, and made me a bow with a very placid smile.

'He is harmless; his ideas are most grand and good,' his wife explained to me, with a nod at him; 'but I could not have you in with the gentleman, Hans. He always makes mistakes with the gentlemen, miss, but with the ladies he behaves quite well.'

'Yes, yes, with the ladies I am nearly always goot,' Herr Strouss replied, with diffidence; 'the ladies comprehend me right, all right, because I am so habitual with my wife. But the gentlemans in London have no comprehension of me.'

'Then the loss is on their side,' I answered with a smile; and he said, 'Yes, yes, they lose vere much by me.'

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